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Weird Tales

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THE MARK of the MONSTER

by JACK WILLIAMSON

a powerful tale of weird horror

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Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Last Pharaoh

By THOMAS P. KELLEY

A strange weird story of a castle of doom on the West African coast—an unbelievably fascinating tale of an English girl and her American sweetheart, and the amazing fate that befell them

1. The Lady on the Liner

On the West African Coast
Sept. 9th or 10th, 1931.

OH GOD! that it were all but a dream! If only I could arise to find that it had been some horrible nightmare, and that now, safe in my hotel room, I would shortly be dining with my Carol. I would shout with joy. I would fall on my knees with prayers of thanks for my safe deliverance.

All is quiet within this great castle of death. No sound, no faintest whisper echoes through its age-old halls. From the loftiest turret to the deepest dungeon a tomb-like silence prevails. Even the squeals of the rats have ceased. That, of course, is to be expected. They have fed well!

A glorious moon shines through the open window to light the interior of the ancient throneroom. From without comes the cool swish of the Atlantic. High overhead, and mysterious as the dark continent itself, are the burning desert stars. The very night that surrounds me teems with a weird beauty.

Before me, in a flood of lunar rays, lies Atma, the incomparable. The scantily clad body of the love-maddened Princess makes a picture of beauty and passion, while that wondrous face, youthful and unchanged by the centuries, still holds the same sensual charms that once aroused unholy desires in Thothmes, Pharaoh of Egypt, thirty-four hundred years ago!

How can I tell my story, how can I ever begin the narration of this tale? What words can describe the indescribable, or relate that upon which I have looked during the past ten days? Sights unbelievable, unthinkable, scenes that were never meant for the eyes of mortal man. . . .

No, I am not mad. This record is not the ravings of an imbecile. On the contrary, it is the authentic data of one who has passed through the most horrible experience a relentless fate could ordain.

I will write my story—the strangest ever penned by man—as it actually happened to me. Nothing omitted, you shall hear the age-old history of Karamour as he himself told it. When I have finished, I will seal my story in this old wine-bottle, cast it into the Atlantic and take the one course left: I will fire this hellish rendezvous of the ages!

The destruction of these great portals alone can save an unsuspecting world from an unthinkable horror. Carefully must I feed the flames till there can be no chance of failure; then, with the burning well under way, I will grasp the modern pistol of an ancient Pharaoh, breathe a short prayer to my maker, and send a heavy bullet crashing into my tortured brain.

It is not through fear that I take this step. Certainly nothing the future might hold could ever compare with the terrors

of the past. It is necessary to blot out, to erase those horrible memories.

And now to my story.

MY NAME is Neil Bryant. I was born in Boston, twenty-seven years ago. No need to weary you with the details of my early years; they were those of the average young American whose people were fairly prosperous. Suffice to say that the death of my father, five years back, found me owner and manager of a well-established lumber concern. For five years I toiled in the yards and offices of my late sire, learning the business from experience and the wise counsel of an old employee.

Then came that fatal vacation. Feeling the need of rest and a change, I booked passage for England. It had been my intention to travel extensively, with later visits to Paris, Rome, and possibly Madrid, but these plans, alas! were never realized.

It was the second day out from New York. Leaving the smoking-room en

"And now, prepare yourselves for the strangest sight your eyes can ever hope to see."

route to my cabin I had stepped into the path of a tall, willowy girl.

"Pardon!" I ejaculated.

For an instant two blue eyes looked at me quizzically; then the pretty face broke into a smile.

"It is nothing," she laughed. "I am quite all right."

"Thanks to a merciful providence," I answered, eager to keep up a conversation with my fair shipmate. "I really should have been more careful."

Still smiling, the girl continued her interrupted walk toward the dining-saloon. I watched her retreating form approvingly, then beckoned a passing steward.

"Who is that young lady?" I asked.

"She is booked, sir, as Miss Carol Terry, of Southampton, England," answered the steward.

I saw no more of the pretty blond stranger that day, and though I lingered over my meal a good hour, I missed her completely at dinner that evening. Later, I ventured for a stroll on deck, hoping for a chance meeting, but failure again was mine. Unexplainably disappointed, I lolled in a deck chair, watching the play of the moonlight on the water and smoking innumerable cigarettes.

The next morning fate was more kind. Early, and quite unexpectedly, I came upon her standing on deck at a point which was temporarily deserted. She was leaning against the rail looking far out to sea, and the richly appareled, well-modeled figure denoted wealth as well as youth.

"Good morning, Miss Terry," I began, half expecting a startled exclamation or a look of ice. "Enjoying a view of the ocean so soon? I had hardly hoped to find you such an early riser. And the salt air—tell me, do you find it remindful of Southampton?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Bryant, delightfully so," came the clear, unexpected answer.

She turned toward me, so cool and fresh in the morning sunshine, smiling at my palpable bewilderment.

"How on earth did you know that?" I asked.

The girl gave a silvery laugh. "Of course, I should ask the same question of you. However, it would really be quite needless, as I already know the answer. As to yourself, I fear your choice of a confidant was a rather poor one."

"My confidant?"

"The steward you questioned. He told me of your inquiry, and also who you were."

"He has betrayed my trust, but I forgive him," I answered, leaning beside her. "Perhaps it was the best thing he could have done—at least we know each other now."

"Only the names."

"Of course," I agreed. "We really know nothing of each other, and I suppose that is important."

The pretty face looked quizzical.

"Well, yes," she admitted; "it does have its advantages."

"Undoubtedly. One must, especially a young lady, be careful of chance acquaintances. In such unchivalrous times as these, treachery and misrepresentation are everywhere. Of course, I could be a banker, a financier or a ridiculously wealthy prince traveling incognito. But again, and to put a strong dash of the drama into it, I might be a racketeer; a bold heartless villain who has eluded the American authorities, and is now headed for England and new fields of plunder."

"Oh, dear no! Surely nothing so horrible as that."

"One can never tell. It is all quite possible. As for yourself; you might be —er—well, you could be——"

"An adventuress!" she interrupted, with mock seriousness; "a clever jewel thief who beguiles men's hearts, while stealing their treasures. Or perhaps a

spy. Yes—that would be better and much more thrilling. A spy; a second Mata Hari in search of a victim."

We both laughed.

"In that event, I am afraid you will find me uninteresting company, Miss Terry. Unfortunately, I am not a general, have not been intrusted with any Government plans, nor do I know a single military secret."

"Not even a small one?"

"Not even a small one," I answered dejectedly. "Also, I fear that my case is quite hopeless. But to put me in the role of villain: In the event of my kidnapping you, who would pay the ransom, and what price should I ask?"

The girl shrugged her graceful shoulders.

"There is only one, I fear, and the amount would have to be a cut-rate. You know—depression, present wage scale, and all that sort of thing. No, I am afraid, Mr. Bryant, that you would find me a very poor hostage."

"I would be quite willing to risk it."

"Then you must be a gambler—no one else would possibly be so rash. Of course," she continued, "of course, you know we are being very silly."

"Perhaps," I admitted, "but it really is lots of fun."

The lovely blond girl looked far out over the tumbling waters.

"Tell me," she inquired, after a slight pause, "do you make it a practise of asking the name of every strange girl you see?"

For an instant, as the blue eyes looked questioningly at me, I detected a slight anxiety as well as mirth.

"No," I confessed. "No, Miss Terry, I do not. There are times, I assure you, when I really am quite formal. I do hope you will forgive this awful breach of etiquette—it must have been the voyage that caused it. This is my first trip, and I've heard that the sea air encourages quick acquaintances."

"So it would appear. However, you were so caught in a mesh of circumstances, I suppose I must forgive you. No doubt the sea has its faults as well as its charm."

"And they are not all bad ones," I replied. "This morning wind arouses a keen desire for breakfast."

"Its effects on me have been strikingly similar."

Only for a moment I hesitated.

"No doubt this is all very improper on my part, Miss Terry," I ventured, "but if I were to be so bold as to ask you to breakfast with me——"

"Perhaps," came the smiling answer, "perhaps with an equal boldness, I might accept."

THUS began my acquaintance with Carol Terry; an acquaintance that was to last for far too short a period. That morning breakfast aboard the great ocean monarch marked the beginning of a friendship with one who was soon to prove the bravest and sweetest girl I ever knew. Little did we realize, as I laughed and chatted with the golden girl on that bright June morning, how soon our merriment would give way to terror—that in a few days her vivacious gayety should turn to a black, nameless horror. Nor did she, poor child, have the faintest idea of her own ghastly future. Youth, sunlight and beauty, together with our cheerful surroundings, made all thoughts of tragedy very remote.

The next few days passed uneventfully. The great white ship plowed rapidly on without a pause. I spent practically all my time with Miss Terry. We whiled away the pleasant hours on board reading, talking or taking pictures with the girl's tiny camera. In the evenings we danced or walked the deck.

Soon I learned her history. Her father, Major Douglas Terry, late of the British army, had recently died. Her mother, an Egyptian woman of noble birth, had passed away some years ago at Cairo, while Carol was still a baby. The girl had finished two years study of music in Berlin, and was now living with her brother, Bob Terry, promising young architect, four years her senior, at Southampton.

We were sitting in our comfortable deck chairs late one afternoon, watching the roll of the sea as it sparkled in the rays of a descending sun. The girl, usually so gay, for once was silent. Lounged deeply in her chair, with long-lashed eyes half closed, she seemed lost in revery. What her thoughts were I could not guess, and yet that they were pleasant seemed obvious by the faint half-smile that played on her lips.

My own mind was none too cheerful, for tomorrow we would land, and the end of the voyage would doubtless mean a termination of our quickly formed friendship. It was not a pleasant thought.

"Your stay in America was short," I remarked at length, "but six weeks. Does that mean you do not like my country?"

The girl turned slowly toward me.

"On the contrary, I liked America very much. Its ways and customs were delightfully different. I enjoyed every moment of my visit. There is nothing I would have loved better than to have stayed a whole year, but I must get back to Bob. He's all I have now, and the poor darling is lost without me."

"Sort of mothering the big brother?"

The girl gave a pretty smile.

"It's what every man needs. But seriously, Dad's death has drawn Bob and me very close. For the first six months following it we were constantly together. And how I had to coax him for the trip! He's all alone, you know, and does not like to share me with anyone."

"We all treasure that which we love," I said. "He's a mighty lucky man having someone to worry over him. How fortunately different from others! Take me for instance: I have no one; that is, barring an aunt in Brooklyn whom I have never seen."

"No brothers or sisters?"

"None," I replied. "I could leap over that railing there, and no one would really care."

"Heavens, Neil!" she exclaimed. "Please don't do anything so rash."

"Perhaps it would be best not to," I agreed, laughing. "No doubt I would find it a weary swim to New York—and dinner so near."

"But twenty minutes," answered my companion, glancing at her jeweled timepiece.

"In this watch," she continued, "you behold an instrument that does more than tell me the hour. That shining case conceals a specimen of youthful skill as an engraver."

"Indeed," I answered, interested.

"An accident in childhood," she explained. "We were children, Bob and I, celebrating Queen Vic's birthday. Bob threw a tiny firecracker that landed on my wrist as it exploded. The result was a painful and permanent impression."

The girl unbuckled the silver dial and extended her arm. On the white wrist was a tiny blue-black, semicircular mark. Scarce half an inch in length, the little brand resembled the clever work of some tattoo artist.

"Why, it appears like the letter C!" I remarked at length. "Yes, like a perfect letter C. And your first name is Carol. What an odd coincidence," I smiled, "branded with your own initial!"

"So Bob said at the time," answered Carol, laughing at the memory of the in-

cident, "as he tried to convince Father that it was no mishap. Unfortunately for him, however, Dad thought differently."

"The rest is easily imagined," I replied, "and it doubtless resulted in a trip to the woodshed for your unhappy brother. However, it really is a minor scar. Even without your watch as a covering, I doubt if it could ever be noticed. So small that——"

A gasp of consternation had escaped my lovely companion.

"Look, Neil! That man there!"

The girl's little hand, trembling with excitement, seized my arm, and her eyes swiftly signaled ahead, as her face changed to a sudden puzzled fear.

At the startled exclamation I turned, to behold a tall man watching us intently. The observing stranger stood at the far end of the deck, and though a dozen passengers lolled between, I instantly knew that it was he to whom Carol referred.

So swiftly had I wheeled about, there was no time for him to drop his eyes, and the gaze that had met me was a cruel, menacing one. For a moment he stood thus; then seeing himself observed and with no means of secretion, he wheeled and walked rapidly away.

I turned toward the girl in mild surprize.

"And who is that fellow?" I asked. "He certainly shows remarkable interest in the affairs of others."

She hesitated a moment before replying.

"I do not know," she admitted, in a perplexed manner. "I really do not know, and yet I am sure I have seen that face before. It is strangely familiar. It could not be—oh, I only imagine it perhaps, but he certainly does appear similar to the man Lucy noticed around the house before I left."

"Lucy?" I answered. "Oh, yes—that is your friend, the girl you visited while in America."

Carol nodded.

"She called my attention to it the day before my departure, said that a man had passed the house several times. I looked from the sun window, but obtained only a fleeting glimpse of him. Then last night, as we danced, I suddenly beheld those same dark eyes upon me, but it seemed so trivial at the time, I made no comment to you about it."

"Then it's time we did something about it now," I said, starting to rise. "You stay here, Carol, while I find that fellow and take him to the captain for questioning."

I had risen from the chair and started after the man, when the girl seized my hand.

"No!" she protested hastily. "No, Neil—please don't! I may be wrong, you know. Perhaps he meant no harm. The poor fellow might have mistaken me for someone else. No, we must not borrow trouble. Please stay."

"Why, of course," I answered, surprized at her determined manner. "Of course, if you wish it."

My surrender pleased her.

"I do. A false accusation would be terrible, and we have no real proof."

"No real proof, perhaps," I murmured, resuming my deck chair, "but he certainly did act in a suspicious manner. Why, that evil retreat was an open confession of guilt of some sort. I really think he should be found and an explanation demanded."

The girl had now recovered her vivacity.

"Oh, let us forget the whole silly thing, and talk of something pleasant," she broke in, laughingly. "Our minds have become as morbid as the grave. We must not destroy what remains of a perfect

voyage with groundless fears and worries."

"But very little remains," I reminded. "We dock tomorrow."

"It could not last for ever."

"And I suppose its ending means that I shall never see you again."

Somehow my efforts to make the remark appear casual were not convincing.

The girl's fingers rested lightly on my arm.

"I see no reason why it should," she replied softly. "Our past few days together have been pleasant ones, nor is my home a great way from your present destination. I will give you my card, and if you ever come to Southampton——"

"You know I want to."

"There will always be a welcome."

2. *The Devil's Ambassador*

My stay in London terminated at length. I was ready to proceed on to Paris, but again fate intervened. Memories of a blue-eyed English girl were constantly before me. Indeed, it was only since our parting that I had come to realize how much she really meant to me. It was then that I made the fatal decision that was to result in such chaos. Paris could wait, I decided, but Carol Terry—never. And so it was, that acceding to my alluring reveries, I at length took train for Southampton.

The evening of my arrival in the seaport town I had phoned Carol, who was plainly quite pleased, though not surprized, at hearing from me so soon. Again came that friendly voice of welcome, and I was soon speeding toward the comfortable brick bungalow, where I met her brother, Bob Terry, a tall, broad-shouldered, smiling young fellow, the sort of chap of which the world holds only too few.

For a few minutes our talk had been general—of the events that were then occupying the attention of Great Britain, of the theatres, and lastly, the renewal of our former brief acquaintance. The friendly atmosphere of the cozily furnished room, and the smiling faces of my companions, invited instant congeniality.

"I am pleased you came tonight, Neil," Carol was saying presently. "Your visit is well timed. There is an old friend of Father's, a Doctor Zola, calling, whom I want you to meet. He is an unusual man, a sort of soldier of fortune as well as a physician, who seemingly has traveled everywhere, and he's very interesting. You are sure to enjoy him."

The girl looked smilingly at her brother, then back to me.

"Incidentally you can save a rather awkward situation, that is, if you will agree to going to the opera."

"Of course," I had answered. "I would be delighted."

"Doctor Zola is a friendly man," she explained, "and the private yacht on which he is engaged has put into port for several weeks. Last evening he called and invited Brother and me to the theatre—an invitation that was promptly accepted. But now Bob finds he has to go over some drawings—his usual excuse to escape anything distasteful to him; so I really do need someone to take his place."

"My knowledge of opera is somewhat limited," I replied, smiling, "but if my presence alone can be of any help, you are surely welcome to it."

"It is settled, then," decided the girl. "You will come with us, and we will leave Mr. Bob to worry over his plans."

Bob Terry, who had been listening quietly, now laughed in a good-natured manner.

"It all suits me tip-top," he announced. "Confidentially, I had put in a dreadful twenty-four hours worrying over it, and when the additional charts came in at the

office, I gave a whoop of joy. Much as I abhor work of any kind, it is always preferable to the élite company of Doctor Zola."

"Bob," protested Carol, "you mustn't."

"But it is the truth, dear," he persisted. "I just can not warm up to the man. Oh, I know, he's gentlemanly, cultured and all that, and no doubt he was a great chum of the Governor's—though I never heard his name mentioned till five weeks ago when he first called and introduced himself. I grant all that and a lot more, but he's just too—er—well, he's just too polite; too neat and mannerly to be real."

"That is hardly a fault," she reminded.

"It becomes one when it is overdone," continued her brother. "I honestly don't believe that Froggy ever said 'damn' in his life, either in English or French. He walks like a ballet dancer, and that greased hair — I know it was never mussed. What is that expression you Americans have," he continued, turning to me, "for someone who annoys you? Oh, 'He gets my goat;' that's the expression."

"Bob, Bob," spoke Carol, "you should not talk that way about the poor man—Dad would not like it. Don't mind him, Neil," she continued, "he's only trying to tease me. The doctor may be somewhat too sedate, perhaps, but then, gallantry should never be criticized. Besides, his stay in Southampton will be so short that we can surely afford to overlook a few little eccentricities."

"You have not known him long?" I asked.

"Scarcely a week. He called first while I was still in America. Through some old acquaintance of Dad's in Paris, he learned our whereabouts. Naturally, he wished to see the children of the late friend he had known years before in Egypt. Bob says he appeared most anxious to meet me, and seemed much put out at my absence."

"Put out is hardly the word," spoke her brother. "Why, he worried more about you than I did. At least twice a week he would call, and continually it was the same thing: 'Where is Mademoiselle Terry?' 'How soon do you expect the return of Mademoiselle Terry?' 'Let us hope I do not miss Mademoiselle Terry.' One would have thought you were his long-lost child."

"He must be a unique character," I laughed at length. "I shall enjoy meeting him."

"Then you will shortly have your pleasure," said Bob Terry, rising, "for it is doubtless he that I hear on the steps. I will let him in, dear," he turned to Carol, "while you make ready. It must be well past eight."

Thirty seconds later I was being introduced to a tall, immaculately dressed man. Doctor Etienne Zola, who must have been past sixty, carried his years with the vigor of a schoolboy. The trim mustache and beard denoted the professional man, while the still handsome face, admirable ease and sophisticated manner told of culture and refinement.

"This is Neil Bryant, Doctor—a friend of Carol's," spoke Terry by way of introduction. "They met aboard ship on the trip back."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the physician, grasping my hand impulsively. "Then you are to be congratulated, *Monsieur*. Those who have met the charming Mademoiselle Terry should consider themselves most fortunate."

Bob Terry gave a soft whistle at this exaggerated flattery which caused the sleek Frenchman to regard him quizzically for a moment.

"Ah, Monsieur Terry," he spoke at length with a puzzled half-smile, "always you will have your little joke. Oh, what

a race, what a droll race, you English! Even your ways of humor are uncertain. It is strange that while but a few miles of water separate our countries, the ideas and manners of your people and mine are as far apart as the stars, a distance that the nearness of centuries has not lessened. But come," he added earnestly, "you must hasten to dress, *Monsieur;* already we are late."

"Unfortunately, I shall be unable to go with you tonight, Doctor," came the drawled answer; "an unexpected blueprint that must not be neglected has come from the office. However, that need not disarrange your plans. Mr. Bryant, I am sure, can be prevailed upon to go in my stead."

Perhaps I only imagined a fleeting look of disappointment.

"Of course, of course! Monsieur Bryant will please consider himself a thousand times welcome."

FOG! Cold, damp, dismal fog. Swirling mists of whiteness that effectively hid the world of a few feet beyond, rose gloomily in the night, as though to mock our straining eyes with its blankets of concealment that floated before the window.

Carol was speaking: "And do be careful, Neil. These horrible mists have caused innumerable accidents. There is no telling when they will lift, and the strongest light penetrates only a few feet against them. Walking is bad enough, but to be dashing through a Southampton fog in some recklessly driven cab, is to court disaster. Perhaps"—the pretty face looked distrustfully at the silent clouds of moisture without—"perhaps you had better stay here tonight."

The past nine days in the seaport town had found me almost constantly in the company of Carol Terry. Theatres, clubs and motor rides had been the general routine, and now, after a night's review of "Grant's Merry Makers," I had escorted the girl to her home, and was ready for my own departure.

"Hardly as bad as all that," I smiled at my companion's uneasiness. "I imagine tomorrow's sun will find me still safe and unharmed. However, if it will calm your fears any, I can dismiss the cab and walk to the hotel."

"I do wish you would."

It was not until I had left the house and emerged into the steaming whiteness that I realized the full strength of the fog. Here a mist of obscurity prevailed. Houses showed only as faint golden glimmers—pedestrians were heard but not seen. A damp, heavy smell arose from the side-walks, while out of the hazy blackness of the night came the melancholy wailing of a fog-horn in the harbor, and occasionally the purring swish of a passing vehicle.

Paying the waiting driver at the curb, I made my slow way through the mists, recalling the girl's parting words: "Be at the docks before twelve, dear; we are going aboard the yacht to wish farewell to Doctor Zola. He sails at noon."

Twice I had seen the French physician during the past week. Though our greeting on both occasions had been mutually friendly, I felt a strong dislike for the man, a vague suspicion in spite of his courteous manner and soft words. Tomorrow he would sail.

I suddenly became aware of soft-treading foot-steps behind me.

The fog had so thickened, the feeble rays cast from the occasional lamp-post were almost useless. Alone in this gloomy world of mist I should have felt safe from any midnight prowler; but the cautious tread beyond the whiteness seemed unlike the honest walk of an ordinary traveler; so, halting beneath the faint

glow of a corner globe, I awaited my unknown stalker.

For a moment the foot-steps grew forebodingly louder, and then several things happened simultaneously. A command was shouted out in French, there was a sound of running feet, and out of the night, with the agility of a panther, sprang a tall dark man; a thin-lipped, powerful assailant, whose uplifted knife, gleaming cruel and sharp in the moisture, told plainly his intentions.

For an instant the searching eyes from the fog paused in surprize at my preparedness; then, with the wailing yell of a savage, the swarthy assassin bounded forward.

As he sprang upon me, my left hand shot out and caught the descending wrist, while my right arm swung around his waist. For a moment we stood locked and swaying in a deadly embrace, he trying to bury his shining knife in my body, and I trying to disarm him and crash my right fist into his chin.

Though the wiry murderer was muscled like a Trojan, my athletic training came to my aid. At length, after several attempts, I succeeded in tripping him. We crashed to the pavement, to continue our silent struggle on its wet bricks. The fight grew desperate. I could hear the laboring gasps of my attacker. The face that looked into mine was human, but the eyes were not; they burned with a weird, sea-green, unearthly stare. And then, as we wrestled and strained in the mists, out from the blackness beyond came the sharp trill of a police whistle.

During the fall to the pavement the man's hold on the knife had loosened, and with a loud clatter it had fallen on the bricks. A repeated whistle told of approaching succor. Its shrill warning spurred him on to a supreme effort. Frantic to avoid capture, with a heave he rolled himself from beneath me, and then giving a fearful wrench succeeded in pulling away from my weakening grasp.

Hurrying foot-steps sounded near by. Stopping only to kick viciously at my upturned face, the stranger fled into the night. An instant later the great form of a blue-coated "Bobby" broke through the fog.

Bruised and shaken, I rose slowly, denying to the inquiring officer the identity or knowledge of reason as to the attack, but I had recognized the man. Once during that brief struggle the face had been outlined clearly enough for me to realize what I vaguely suspected, and I knew that the stranger from the mists and the unknown watcher on the ocean liner had been the same man.

The following noon I was driven to the great Southampton docks, where a few inquiries soon found me the *Star of Egypt*, a trim little craft whose berth as private physician to its wealthy owner was held by Etienne Zola.

Earlier that morning Carol Terry had phoned to remind me of the appointment at the yacht. That she had heard nothing of last night's occurrence was evident, nor did I mention it, knowing that it would only distress her.

On deck I found the French physician himself and seven or eight dark, rough-looking fellows; the latter hard at work grooming the tiny vessel and making her ready for sea. He greeted me pleasantly, and led me down to his cabin where sat the ship's commander, Captain Barakoff, a tall, black-bearded Russian, who nodded in a cold, disinterested way.

"Monsieur Bryant," explained Zola, "is a friend of Mademoiselle Terry and her brother who will be aboard shortly. A welcome guest, though his coming is unexpected." The physician smiled pleasantly.

The splendors of the large quarters

were extraordinary. That he was a most luxurious person was evidenced by the room, which was newly fitted with velvet and gold in a manner that would become the yacht of an emperor.

On board the ship I had noticed the rising clouds of smoke, and other indications of an immediate preparedness for sea.

"You will be sailing shortly, Captain?" I asked presently, during a lull in conversation.

"Within the hour, Mr. Bryant, within the hour. We are bound for Rio—that Eden of the South, where tropical nightingales sing in the twilight. You have been there, perhaps? No? Ah, well, in that respect you Americans are somewhat like the French—poor travelers."

"Softly, *mon capitaine,* softly," answered Zola in a querulous voice, leaning forward in his chair. "As history will tell you, it was but a short century ago that a certain little man led the armies of my country into nearly every capital in Europe. Moscow, I believe, was paid its visit, despite several efforts on the part of your own people to halt their uninvited guests. Cairo, Berlin, Venice—to all of them he rendered social obligations. It will be a bad day for the world when the French start traveling again, I promise you."

The black-bearded commander laughed loudly at this sally.

"Ah, well, I am not the one who will hold an ancient grievance. Open yon cabinet and you will find me ready to drink a toast to your beloved France with your own sparkling wines, the Bourbon of America, or strong Russian vodka."

Doctor Zola rose with a faint smile.

"To the success of our voyage would be a toast more appropriate for the present occasion."

"As you will," said the Russian with a shrug; "so long as we can drink, the reason matters little. But what about you, Mr. Bryant? Is your patriotism to America equally loyal and fervent?"

Whatever answer I might have given to the question was never uttered. A high-pitched voice suddenly sounded above us. The next instant running footsteps came flying down the corridor, and a tall man burst excitedly into the cabin.

"They are here!" he cried. "They are here!"

He stood on the costly rug, panting and unable to find his words. Then again he broke out: "Even now, oh master, the fair one and her brother mount the gangplank. They——" and then as the man's eyes fell upon me, his face went livid.

"You!" he gasped.

Doctor Zola looked at the newcomer in anger.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"It means," I answered, springing to my feet, "it means that this man is an attempted murderer. Last night during the fog he sprang upon me——"

"Ten thousand hells!" shrieked Zola, and the man cringed before the rage of his flashing eyes. "So you have allowed yourself to be recognized as well as to miserably fail in your sacred sworn duty! You have handled your mission like a blundering fool!

"Stay where you are, *Monsieur!*" he ordered, wheeling quickly toward me, as a small automatic appeared in his hand. "Stay where you are as you value your life. One shout, one single move—and you die!"

Dazed at this turn of events, I raised my hands as I gazed in speechless wonderment at the Frenchman.

"But the girl, oh master; the girl and her brother—even now they are asking for you. What will I tell them? What are we to do?"

Doctor Zola stared mutely at his inquirer. For once his nimble wits had deserted him. The man seemed bewildered, uncertain. He cast a worried glance overhead.

"*Sapristi!*" wailed Barakoff. "Is this muddling American to thwart our plans at the last minute? Must the schemings of countless centuries be made futile by the curiosity of one man?"

"No, nothing will stop us. The commands of Karamour must be obeyed though the heavens fall!"

The physician was talking in an earnest, assured tone.

"Here, Captain, take this gun and keep him covered while Abdul binds and gags him. I must present myself to the Terrys above and prevent any suspicion. Do not be afraid to shoot if necessary. Too much is at stake to be halted by a little bloodshed."

With a brief order to the watching lackey, Zola hurried from the room.

Overhead, I knew the unsuspecting Carol and Bob were destined to meet some unknown, perhaps horrible fate. And here stood I, the only one who could possibly warn them, as powerless as though I were on some distant planet. The tall Abdul had procured a stout rope and was moving toward me. The ready automatic pointed at my head, and to resist him would mean instant destruction. Yet I could not submit to the swarthy assassin and relinquish the one chance of aiding my friends. Perhaps——

"Don't do it, Bryant!" snarled Barakoff, guessing my intentions. "Don't try shouting out a warning to them above. It will mean your death, and the glib Doctor Zola can quickly explain it as the meaningless yell of a rum-befuddled sailor. Be silent, man. Be silent and sensible—it's your only hope! Turn around," he continued. "Turn around and face the wall. Hurry! There now—raise your hands—higher!"

Helpless, I turned my back toward the grim Russian. Softly the two men came nearer. I heard a quick whisper. There was a brief, terrible silence. Then a body moved suddenly. An agonizing pain shot through my head, the room spun crazily around, horrible red waves sprang before my eyes, and I sank to a dark oblivion.

3. *Shanghaied*

It was, as I afterward learned, some two hours later when I regained consciousness. The first sensation was a throbbing pain in my head. The room appeared unsteady, while my eyes seemed almost too weak to lift the lids. Gradually I became aware that I lay on a hard bunk in a tiny cabin-like room. The dull rumbling of machinery sounded far and distant.

Minutes passed. At length, with a low groan, I sat up. Slowly my eyes traveled around the bleak interior of the chamber. It was then that I first noticed the small port-hole on the far side of the room. Beyond was a patch of blue sky. Instantly my haziness cleared, and leaping from the cot I sprang toward the tiny opening, my heart heavy with dread. One brief glance confirmed my suspicion. As far as the eyes could see was naught but a tumbling waste of water. We were at sea!

Dazed by the discovery, I glanced around the chamber for some quick means of escape. The only exit, other than the port-hole, was a small oak door which proved, upon examination, to be securely locked on the outside. The contents of the room were few. A chair, a small table, together with a cot, comprised the simple furniture, while a tiny closet, evidently a clothes-press, was bare.

The port-hole could be dismissed as

useless, its tiny opening being much too small to permit escape. I could, of course, wrench a leg from the table and try my luck at battering in the door, but this would surely cause an immediate investigation from without. There must be another way. I thought of several wild plans, and was balancing one against the other when the question was decided for me in a simple but unexpected manner.

Heavy foot-steps sounded in the corridor without. The door of the cabin was suddenly flung back, and following a gigantic negro who bore a tray of dishes, there entered the one person in all the world I desired most to see—Doctor Etienne Zola.

Standing languidly in the small doorway, the sleek Frenchman appeared as a framed vision of satanic evil. A nasty smile lit the malevolent features.

"Ah, Monsieur Bryant," he began, "how often will a considerate fate throw us together? First at the home of the charming *mademoiselle*. Again, on the Southampton streets, and now I find I am to be honored with the unexpected pleasure of your company on this voyage. *Wallah!* Is it not perfect? The crew too (thoughtful fellows all of them) have risen to the spirit of the occasion, and even now are making preparations for your entertainment. *Mon Dieu!* What could possibly be more touching than——"

"Cut it!" I snapped, rising to my feet. "That cheap line of yours is neither funny nor helpful. Just what is this all about, and why am I here? And Carol—what has become of her? Where is Miss Terry, and her brother?"

The physician gave a mirthless laugh and seated himself on the chair.

"Oh, *Monsieur,* but you are impatient! Here, thinking only of your comfort, I bring you a splendid dinner, and you say nothing—not even a mere '*merci*'. Come, come, you must be different. Have the goodness to wait and I will explain everything—that is, everything I think you should know."

At a quick gesture from Zola, the huge black set his tray upon the tiny table; then leaning resignedly against the wall, he continued to stare at me in a stupid, puzzled manner.

Doctor Zola extended his cigarette case toward me. "No?" he remarked, as I shook my head. "Then later, perhaps; they are an excellent blend."

He seemed master of the situation, this sleek Frenchman. The suave manner was almost admirable. Here was one who could not be easily bullied or frightened. Comfortably seated on the tiny chair and slowly puffing a cigarette, one might have imagined that he had not a care in the world.

"You have not answered my questions," I reminded,

"Of course, of course, *Monsieur,*" he replied breezily. "A thousand pardons for the inattention. My mind had inexcusably wandered elsewhere, but I am now yours to command. However," he added with a sly smile, "pray do not be too inquisitive, as your curiosity might cause me to commit an indiscretion."

"Where is Carol Terry?"

"*Mademoiselle,* as well as her brother, is aboard the yacht. Neither has been harmed or molested. Both are safe, and will continue to be so during our long voyage. That much, for the peace of your mind, I truthfully tell you. It is quite needless to worry over their welfare."

"What about myself?"

Doctor Zola looked meditative.

"That is somewhat difficult to say, *Monsieur,*" he answered slowly. "Your position is decidedly awkward, like that of the uninvited guest. You see, he does not expect you."

"He?"

"The one who made this all possible—the powerful ruler whom I serve. Your coming will be a surprize to him. Let us hope that it is a pleasant one. Your fate would not be easy should it prove otherwise."

"Be more explicit, Doctor Zola. It is quite obvious that we have been shanghaied. What I wish to know is why it happened, and what you intend doing with us."

"As you wish, *Monsieur,*" he answered with a shrug. "Briefly, it is like this: I was sent for the sole purpose of bringing Mademoiselle Terry and her brother to him. The reason, I do not care to divulge. For weeks I was forced to wait while the fair one visited in America, but my purpose was not to be denied. Unfortunately for you, when I laid my plans to entice them aboard, you came also, in spite of my trying so hard to have it otherwise. You have only yourself to thank for your present predicament.

"Now, as to the future: We are going on a long voyage, *Monsieur,* and I hope it will be a peaceful one. The handling of this yacht with our limited crew will be in itself a difficult task, and one that can stand for no interruption. Thus, your position is made quite plain. Be sensible, cause no trouble or disturbance, and you will be well treated. On the other hand, any rebellious or unruly conduct, and you shall be severely punished. There now, I think that just about takes in everything."

"Not quite," I answered. "There are still a few more things I would like made clear. First, just where is the destination of this so-called long voyage?"

"That I must not tell you."

"Then, as to our fate when we get there," I demanded impatiently. "You can surely tell me that."

"I can, *Monsieur,*" came his cheery answer. "Doubtlessly I could tell you many things you wish to know, if I but chose. However——" A defiant snap of his long fingers finished the sentence.

"Listen, Zola," I warned, leaning forward, "if any harm comes to Carol Terry, I will kill you. If you or anyone else so much as——"

"Don't do anything rash, Monsieur Bryant," he hissed. "Don't do anything you may later have cause to regret. One word from me, and Zena will break you! He has the strength of a gorilla and obeys me implicitly."

One had only to look at the giant to realize the truth of that statement. Never had I seen such an enormous man. Standing nearly seven feet in height, and weighing well over three hundred pounds, he resembled a huge tower. Great, rolling muscles played on his massive neck and chest, while the arms and legs, long and powerful, were swollen with thick, heavy sinew.

"There now," purred Zola, "I knew you would be sensible—it is the only way." A taunting smile lit his thin face. "But come," he continued, rising, "I am afraid this enjoyable chat is causing me to neglect important duties elsewhere. Be of good cheer though, you will be seeing me quite frequently, and in the meanwhile I shall have some reading-matter sent to you. *Au revoir,* then, for a short time. Come, Zena."

At the doorway he paused.

"One last bit of advice, *Monsieur:* do not attempt to speak with Zena, for you will find it useless. The poor fellow is a horrible example of the treatment to talkative slaves in the distant past. Balkis, Queen of Sheba, had his tongue cut out over three thousand years ago when he told of a witnessed intimacy between her and Solomon!"

THE afternoon dragged slowly by, each hour seemingly a century. The awful solitude of the room, together with the fearful uncertainty as to the future, was enough to try the strongest nerves. Amid the creaking of timbers and splashing of the waves, the little ship plowed its way toward the unknown.

At sundown the giant Zena came again with food and drink. Wordless, as before, the black set the tray upon the table, retrieving the one he had left there. Of course, I had not believed the wild tale Zola told about him. It had been related solely to add a spice of horror to the dark mystery.

During the next five days the great black was my only visitor. Twice daily, at noon and again at sundown, he would make his speechless entrance. At first I had bombarded him with questions, but to no avail. Always his answer was the same; a dull stare, and a slow shaking of the massive head. At length, realizing the helplessness, I had desisted, so that now my manner had become as silent as his own.

My indifference had in no way lessened his vigilance. No matter how brief his stay, the black Hercules always managed to keep his mighty form between me and the doorway. It was evident that he neither liked nor trusted me. Never for an instant would his eyes leave mine, and the glare was always hostile.

During the past forty-eight hours there had been a steady rise in temperature, so that now—the end of our fifth day at sea—the heat within the stuffy little cabin was almost unbearable. The slight breeze that reached me from the port-hole was hot and sultry. It was evident that we were being taken far to the south.

It was quite late that night before I turned off the single little bulb that gave light to the cabin and sought my berth. I had scarcely closed my eyes when a strong hand was shaking my shoulder, and a quick command of warning hissed softly into my ears.

"Quiet, matey! For God's sake not a word!"

Where I lay it was dark as Erebus. Vainly my eyes tried to penetrate the blackness. A strained breathing was just above me, and I could feel the animal warmth of a hovering body. Noiselessly I pushed my hand forward till it came in contact with a human face.

"Who are you?" I whispered.

"A friend, matey, a friend!" came the tremulous voice from the dark. "Just keep your words lowered and everything will be all right. Tell me, first of all, who are you, and how did you get here? Be quick about it though—I can't stay long."

"I am an American—came aboard this yacht to meet some friends who knew Doctor Zola. While awaiting their arrival I accidentally learned of a plot to abduct them. To keep me silent, I was slugged and put here. I don't know what happened to my companions."

The man gave a soft whistle.

"So that's the way it is, eh? Got you aboard, then dish out the old k. o. I knew there was something rotten in Denmark right from the start, but I just couldn't make it all out. So they shanghaied you," and then suddenly: "Do you know why?"

"No more than you do," I answered truthfully.

For a moment there was silence as he meditated my answer.

"Oh, I knew we shouldn't have signed on—but what else was there to do? Harry and me (that's my matey, Harry Tompkins)—we are both broke and have to get a berth somewhere, so we joins on here an hour before sailing. You know how it is with the pocketbook empty—

you'll take anything. Well, we signs on, but it's not till we get aboard that I notice the crew's all Arabs, excepting Zola, the captain and the big Zena."

"How did you know about me?" I asked.

"That wasn't hard. I noticed the big fellow was always luggin' grub into the lower cabin. The fact that I never seen or heard anyone, led me to believe they were holding somebody a prisoner. I told Harry about it yesterday, but he said for me to mind my own business and be glad it wasn't one of us. That did seem the best thing to do, but now, after what Harry heard, it looks like the jig is up for all of us."

"What was that?"

"Plenty!" answered the sailor. "Early this evening Harry is doin' some deck work when he heard Captain Barakoff talkin' to the doctor. The old boy is tellin' the Frenchy he didn't want to hire any new hands, but being a few seamen short, was forced to. He said he did not trust the two newcomers, and wondered what he should do with us after they landed. Then Doctor Zola laughs like the very devil, and says there is only one thing to do with sailors you can't trust. Of course, they are talkin' in French and figured that no one could understand them, but Harry, who's been up and down these waters since he was a nipper of ten, speaks their lingo fairly well, and savvies the whole business.

"Tonight, when I gets off duty, Henry tells me all he heard. 'We are gonners', he says. 'We are gonners, Jeff' (that's me—Jeff Adams), 'if we don't make a break for it. But I tells him to wait—I'll sneak in and see the prisoner they have and find out if he wants to string in with us. So I stays up tonight till Zena turns in. Then I sneaks the key—and here I am."

There was something pleasing about this voice from the darkness—something that inspired faith and confidence. At first I had been dubious, wary of some kind of a trap, but the tones having banished skepticism, I now felt for his hand and squeezed it warmly.

"You can count on me to the last, Jeff, although it does look pretty hopeless. The Lord alone knows how far we are from the nearest land."

"Not a great way. Not a great way, matey," came the soft assuring answer. "Around midnight tomorrow, or shortly after, according to Harry's calculations, we should pass the Cape Blanco light. If so, the rest is easy. First, we will overcome the pilot; then Harry will steer us in while you and I keep the crew covered. After all, there is only twelve of them, and if we take 'em by surprize, three well-armed men should be able to turn the trick."

"The plan sounds good, Jeff, and I am all for it," I agreed, "but where can we possibly hope to get guns on this yacht?"

The sailor gave a gasp of surprize.

"Get guns!" he ejaculated. "Where can we hope to get guns? Then—then you don't know? Why, man, this ship is a floating arsenal! There's over five thousand rifles and half a million rounds of ammunition aboard her.

"Maybe they're a bunch of gun runners," he continued; "heard there was a gang of them operating somewhere on the West Coast between Rio de Oro and Guinea Gulf. But I have to hurry back. They mustn't wake up and find me gone. Once they saw my empty bunk, a search would follow, and that would mean discovery. Good-bye for now. I will come for you tomorrow at midnight, or as soon after as we sight Cape Blanco light. It is our only chance. We will make that African coast or die trying. Keep awake and ready!"

4. *A Break for Liberty*

THE following day passed with a dull monotony, broken only by the brief visits of Zena. I had expected this, of course, and scrutinized the black face closely for some sign that might betray his knowledge of my midnight caller, but none came. Apparently, the giant knew nothing. This was comforting, to be sure, while not altogether convincing. The calm serenity did not necessarily mean ignorance on the part of the others. The ship's crew might be well aware of the plot, and fully prepared, but waiting for us to exercise it.

There was a possible one chance in a hundred thousand for the success of the venture. The main difficulty was its countless angles. The whole plan comprised a series of smaller enterprises, each in itself a dangerous one. I strongly questioned the ability of Jeff Adams to smuggle three guns from under the very eyes of the Arabs. Concealing the weapons till nightfall would be another problem. Then the probability of the three of us subduing twelve swarthy sailors was in itself a remote one. No need for any false delusion—the odds against us were enormous. But at least there was a fighting chance.

Night came slowly on. The sun, large and golden, sank lower in the sea to presently disappear with that quickness so common in the tropics.

As on other evenings, I could hear the soft singing of the Arab crew, who, with their day's toil completed, were wont to gather in the quiet hour of dusk and croon their plaintive songs to the stars. At length quietness prevailed upon the vessel. It was well past eleven before I put out the cabin bulb. I stood beside the port-hole, fully dressed, to begin my weary vigil.

Shall I ever forget that dreadful wait? Lonely the hours crept slowly by. Twelve—twelve-thirty—then one. Within the tiny room was a death-like stillness, broken only by the faint rumbling of the ship's engines. The uncertainty of the lonely watch was maddening. Two o'clock came, as did three, with but blackness on the horizon. Had the Englishman erred in his judgment? Did I look for a light that would never come? The tiny hands on my wrist watch, made clear by the moon rays through the port-hole, showed the hour to be some minutes after four. Already the first streaks of gray were whitening the east. In half an hour it would be dawn. My long hours of waiting appeared to have been useless, when, lo, a golden twinkling suddenly shone out in the east.

Cape Blanco light! There it was, out over the dark rolling waters, my star of hope. With a deep sigh of relief, I turned from the port-hole that had so long been my station. The momentous hour was now at hand. It only remained for my fellow-plotters to join me; but even as I thought this, the small door quietly opened and a figure entered cautiously, as a scarce audible murmur pronounced my name.

Instantly I recognized the familiar voice.

"Right here, Jeff," I whispered.

"Good!" came the tense reply, and I felt the hard outlines of a revolver thrust into my hand. "Now listen carefully, matey, here's the lay of the land. Harry is out on deck waiting for us. First, we will sneak up to the pilot-house and overpower the steersman. The guard has gone below for coffee. It will be an easy matter to nab him when he comes back. Then, while Harry turns east and steers in, you and I will go below, wake and tie up the crew one by one. You just keep 'em covered, and let me do the hitchin'. After that we can go to the upper cabin

and put the skids under Zola and the captain. Harry will have us pretty well in by then, and the rest won't be hard."

"But my friends?"

"We had better leave 'em where they are. They can't help us any, and it will be a lot safer in the cabins. No telling just how this thing is gonna turn out—might be some hot lead flying around. All set? Well"—Jeff Adams breathed deeply—"here's hoping for the best anyway. Let's go!"

Steadily we crept from the cabin that had so long been my prison. Down the narrow passageway I followed my guide, to emerge presently on the foul-smelling quarters of the crew. Here a dim bulb cast its feeble rays on ten repulsive figures, the slumbering cutthroats of the *Star of Egypt*.

Scarce daring to breathe, we began a careful tiptoe into the chamber. On all sides rose the subdued breathing that denotes slumber. The rumbling engines drowned the almost noiseless entrance; yet, despite our most Herculean efforts, would come the occasional squeaky tread that might well awaken a light sleeper. Could we make it? Arabs have notoriously sharp ears, and their treatment of an intruder is swift and deadly. Further, ever further we are advancing into the apartment. Three-quarters of the room have been traversed. Only a few more steps now—and then a huge sailor from a near-by bunk murmured sleepily.

With the agile bound of a tiger, Jeff Adams sprang quietly toward the dark seaman who might prove our ruin. For a long, nerve-racking moment, as we waited with pounding hearts and straining eyes, the muscular hands of my companion hovered but an inch above the swarthy throat of the sailor. Now the man gave an audible sigh as though in the throes of some bad dream. The eyes partly opened; then, slowly turning upon his side, he resumed his interrupted slumber. A moment later there came once more the sound of his regular breathing.

In the dark passageway beyond, we crossed a tiny intersecting corridor, coming at length to a narrow stairway up which, on opening another door, we found ourselves out on a silent deck. Here a tall figure joined us, his revolver gleaming coldly in the starlight.

"It's Harry," reassured Adams at my startled exclamation, and then: "How's everything up here, matey—O. K?"

"Quiet as a bloomin' mill-pond," came the answering whisper. "Onurb is at the wheel alone. The other bloke is still below."

Jeff Adams gave a soft exclamation of joy. "What could be sweeter? Boy, oh boy, if this luck only holds out we'll turn the trick in jig-time. Oh yes, here's that Bryant fellow, and he's with us to the end. You know what to do now, Harry," he continued, and as the other nodded: "Good! Come on then, and for God's sake be careful!"

Crouched like escaped felons in the shadows of the deck, we made our quiet way toward the pilot-house. Despite the many dangers, I felt a strange thrill. This was life! Here was adventure! With ready revolvers we drew nearer to the doomed Arab steersman.

Suddenly Jeff Adams, who was in the lead, motioned a quick halt. One look forward made his reason apparent. We had reached the pilot-house. Through the open door I could see the intended victim within; a broad, swarthy Arab, steering lazily by the stars.

The tall Englishman crept forward with the stealth of a cat. At the door he grasped his revolver by the barrel in club fashion, and had stepped quickly within, when the man, warned by some subtle sense, turned suddenly and faced him.

A wild cry rang out to the night, a piercing yell of rage and fear. Muttering a curse, Harry sprang upon the man to club him into unconsciousness before his shouts could arouse the sleeping crew below, but again luck played us false. With a desperation born of his great fear, the swarthy man grabbed the descending gun arm, and raising his own powerful fist aloft, sent it crashing into the Englishman's unprotected jaw. Like a sack of meal the sailor dropped in his tracks.

With a leap I was in the pilot-house, stepping over the inert form at the doorway. The wild-eyed Arab, to whom everyone was now an enemy, sprang to meet me, and armed as I was, it would have been a simple matter to have stopped him; yet I could not bring myself to shoot down a defenseless man. Shifting quickly to the right, I evaded the outstretched arms and met the onrushing body with a left hook that sent him crashing into the frail wall, to fall dazed to the floor. At the same instant, lights flashed below as the awakened crew rushed out on deck.

Jeff Adams gave a bitter laugh.

"The breaks seem to be going against us, Bryant," he announced calmly, taking aim and firing into the little group.

A howl of pain told he had scored a hit, and then the startled crew, realizing we had already gained control of the pilot-house, rushed madly to the stairs. Up the steps they came, a cursing, yelling band of cutthroats, some drawing knives, a few with guns, while the leader, a surly brute of a man with a huge bludgeon, made straight for Adams.

The fallen steersman had now staggered to his feet, and with a loud yell, rushed fearlessly upon me. This time he closed in, and despite my desperate efforts to club him, succeeded in grappling me in a fierce embrace. Around the small room we wrestled as I sought to free my arm for the brief instant it would take to crash home the revolver.

Out on deck the din was terrible—shouts and curses, together with the loud reports of roaring guns, split the early dawn; while high above all could be heard the horrible shriek of one in mortal agony.

At last I succeeded in freeing myself from the grasp of the clinging Arab. Shoving him forcibly from me and raising my heavy revolver, I brought its butt end down into the man's face, breaking his nose as he fell to the floor in a crimson mass. Then two mighty hands seized my wrists in a vise-like grip, and I was held as though I were but a child, while a black stupid face looked curiously into mine. And now, as the din suddenly ceased, a commanding voice rang out:

"Desist, you fools! Desist!"

Pushed quickly from the pilot-room by the great Zena, I saw an appalling scene. Sprawled on the crimson-stained deck in a grotesque heap lay Jeff Adams, while near by, three blood-covered men were carefully bearing a silent figure below. Farther on stood the hastily dressed Zola and Captain Barakoff, grim and serious in that cold dawn.

"Monsieur Bryant soon forgot my warning," began Zola in a voice that trembled with anger. "I assure you that not so quickly will you forget your punishment for this night's work. Its unique methods will doubtlessly remain for the short space of life that is still yours."

I did not answer, being much too sickened by the woful termination of our rash venture. This, then, punishment and death, was the end of our plans and schemings. What a terrible finis to a plot so hopefully begun!

With a tired shrug I turned toward the east that might have been our haven. A light blue sky rose from a dark blue sea, and far away at the point where they

met, lay the faint marks of a long black line.

"Yes," spoke Barakoff, following my gaze, "it is indeed the African coast. I have no doubt that your learned English friend has already told you as much."

Captain Barakoff looked questioningly at the French physician.

"It will be the last bit of information he will ever give anyone," said Zola dryly. "Captain Barakoff, summon your crew."

The order was soon effected. A few minutes later, I, poor Jeff Adams and Harry, the English sailor, each gripped in the strong arms of two muscular Arabs, were held before Doctor Zola as condemned prisoners might once have stood before the dreaded inquisition. Adams, ghostly in the morning light, could scarcely hold up, because of his wounds. Harry, too, looked bruised and disheveled, while my own knuckles were burst and bleeding. We had tried, we had failed, and now like grim specters we stood awaiting the words that should doom us.

"Men of Karamour," shouted the garrulous Zola, getting that attention he so dearly loved, "you see once again the folly of rebellion—the utter futility of trying to thwart your Master. Prince Karamour must be served. To gain that which has been promised you in the life beyond, your minds, your bodies, your very souls must be given unquestionably to him.

"You know this, and you obey. Yours, then, will be the paradise and glory. But these strange ones, these three unbelievers—they do not know, they do not obey. They would but scoff at the wisdom of the past, only jeer at the teachings of Anubis. Knowledge, then, is not for them, but they will not be denied punishment. They have sinned, and they must pay! The Lion-headed Sekhmet must have her just dues. We will try the courage of the modern ones who worship only Bastel, the ancient Goddess of Greed and Passion. Their bravado has been open—let us test it and see how bravely they will face the bright steel. Come, Zena—the blade!"

The black, who left the deck after handing me over to my captors, had now reappeared. Naked but for a loincloth, the giant negro might well have passed for a walking statue of Hercules. Across one broad shoulder rested a great, two-handed sword such as had graced countless scaffolds in the past. The grim appearance left no doubt as to his meaning.

I spoke the disgust I felt: "What are we supposed to do now, Zola — look frightened?"

The remark appeared to amuse the Frenchman.

"Still calm and heroic, *Monsieur?* Well, in this case I suppose you can afford to be, as it is only your companions who are to suffer. Later, perhaps, after I have talked to the Master, will come your own turn. Meanwhile, you will pardon the discourtesy if I employ effective methods to silence you—your oratorical efforts are somewhat tiring."

Doctor Zola spoke a few words to one of the Arabs, who, producing some cloth strippings, effectively gagged me. Then, securely held from behind, I could but mutely look on at the horrible scene so soon to be enacted.

Barakoff and the French physician had gone into a short conference with much whispering and gestures. An agreement reached at last, the captain now turned to my unfortunate companions.

"Seamen Tompkins and Adams," he announced, "you are guilty of mutiny. An ancient rule commands that he who has punished shall himself be punished in a like manner. It is the creed of Kara-

mour. Seaman Abdulla, who was twice wounded in the recent skirmish, has lost the permanent use of his right hand. It is, therefore, our just decree that you yourself must suffer the same loss. That is all."

"Not quite, *mon capitaine,*" drawled Zola in his languid manner. "You forgot to mention that we can have no use for disabled seamen. Again, you have completely ignored my own kind intercession for the prisoners. *Mon Dieu,* how could you possibly be so thoughtless? However," he continued, with a wicked smile at the two unhappy wretches, "perhaps it is best that I enlighten them. *Messieurs,* you wished to reach Cape Blanco. Graciously, I now grant you that desire. As soon as our just sentence has been duly carried out, you may proceed, unmolested, to the coast."

The two men, who had heard the dread sentence passed without a tremor, now showed fear for the first time.

"God!" gasped Adams hoarsely, realizing the awful significance of the words, "you don't mean you're going to—to throw us overboard after it's done?"

"Why not? Only a short swim for two stalwart sailors," laughed the Frenchman, pleased at the visible terror of the doomed men.

The two prisoners exchanged silent, fear-widened stares of horror.

"But we can't swim it," came the agonized plea of the Englishman. "It's too far. Gawd, sir, it's too far, and even if we could—the sharks!" he shrieked. "The water's alive with them!"

"So I have heard, *Monsieur*—the creatures are quite numerous. They tell me too that the smell of blood attracts them."

A wild shout from the Arab crew, who had been listening in eager anticipation, showed their cruel appreciation of the grim humor.

Whatever further mercy the sailor might have begged was cut short by Adams.

"Stow it, Harry!" he snapped. "Can't you see what a big kick that devil's gettin' out of your whining? There's as much chance of mercy from him as a snowball has of goin' through hell!—Come on, fellow," he turned to the waiting Zena, "let's get this over with."

THAT which followed has been burned in my memory. Helpless, I watched the destruction of my unfortunate companions. As Adams was dragged toward the negro, the tip of the rising sun rose up from the waters of the east, as though to lighten that awful tragedy on the sparkling blue.

Slowly Zena raised the heavy blade, while three swarthy sailors, forcing poor Adams to his knees and grasping his right arm, held the wrist firmly on a heavy wooden block that had been dragged forth for the purpose.

"Watch closely, Monsieur Bryant," came a taunting voice.

For a brief instant there was a pause while the heavens blushed at the sight: the watching Arabs, the smirking Zola and, towering above all, the mighty figure of the black swordsman. The great muscles tensed. There was a whirring of steel, a flashing light, and the hand was severed.

Justice having been administered, the two guards hustled the unhappy Adams to the ship's railing. A merciful unconsciousness had luckily claimed him, and he was blissfully unaware of the jibes that escorted him. There came a shout, a quick heave, and Jeff Adams was claimed by the clear waters of the Atlantic.

The merciless crew had turned to Tompkins, and once again the horrid scene was enacted. When at last the Englishman had been tossed, still shriek-

ing, to the waves, Captain Barakoff wheeled threateningly toward me.

"You will now be returned to your quarters," he snapped. "Consider yourself most fortunate that yours has not been a similar fate. Next time it shall not go so easy. Another attempt like this, and I will have you flogged."

The bearded brute turned to his swarthy crew.

"Remove the gag and escort the prisoner to his cell. If he resists, bury your knives in his body!"

At the stairway I paused for a last look seaward. The ship was rapidly drawing away from Tompkins (Adams had already sunk) who was now attempting the almost impossible task of reaching the distant coast. Could he make it? Was it possible that he might still be saved? And even as I wondered and hoped for the poor, half-butchered devil, large black fins cut through the water, making rapidly for the struggling sailor.

5. *The Castle of Gloom*

EARLY that evening a visitor came to my cabin; a tall, thick-set man, with flaming dark eyes and bearded features, whose sharp voice rang like the angry bark of a hound. The intrusion itself was unusual. Excepting Zena, and the one brief visit from Doctor Zola, no one had entered this cheerless little room. So it was with some surprize that I now beheld the ship's grim commander, Captain Alexis Barakoff.

Standing in the doorway, his giant shoulders turned sideways that he might enter at all, the great Russian regarded me with a sinister sneer.

"Perhaps you can guess why I am here?" he asked at length.

"No, I cannot tell."

"It should be to punish you," he snapped. "I only wish it were so. Quickly would I teach you the first law of the sea—subordination; teach it in such a manner you would never forget."

I made no reply — had not even deigned to look upon him after the first brief glance of recognition. This was not merely a show of bravado on my part. Somehow, Captain Barakoff could never inspire my fear or interest.

"It may yet come," he continued, his voice rising in anger at my apparent indifference. "Don't be deluded by any false hopes. The mercies of Karamour are seldom tender. Who knows but that some day mine may be the hand to hold the knout that will lash the last breath of life from your quivering body; that to me, perhaps, shall the brave American whine for mercy."

He gave a short laugh at the thought.

"Ah yes, the paths of the future are strange and baffling, while those of the present appear serene. However, it is of another matter that I come to speak. You are to hold yourself in readiness for disembarkment. In two hours we shall have landed, and you are to be sent ashore."

To disembark?—to be sent ashore? Then—the trip was over! Our mystery voyage at last had ended, and we were now at its unknown destination.

I turned to the commander. "You say I am to be sent ashore. Does that mean I shall be alone?"

Captain Barakoff paused in his exit.

"Then you do feel some interest, eh?" he asked, with a nasty smile that showed the white teeth gleaming through his black beard. "Not so cool and indifferent after all. A little worried too, perhaps? Yes, I thought you would come around to it. But it is needless. You will have company—lots of it. Really, Mr. Bryant, that might prove to be the one grievous fault—too much company!"

With the passing of the hours a dismal

rain had set in. Soon would my anxiety be satisfied. Suddenly there came the rapid tinkling of a silvery bell, and then the engines ceased rumbling.

Springing to the port-hole, I was trying to pierce the wet blackness without, when my cabin door was again suddenly opened. This time the intruder was Zena, and acting on the impatient gesture of the giant black, I followed him down the small corridor and up the stairs to the deck.

All was hustle and excitement. Running Arab sailors were scurrying to obey the loud oaths and yells of Captain Barakoff, who roared his orders from the pilot-house above. The mist-drenched skins of the half-naked sailors glowed like dull bronze in the feeble deck lights.

Just beneath the bearded commander, the languid Zola leaned lazily against the stairway. Now, on noticing me, a quick smile lighted his dark features and he pointed eastward.

"Our destination!" he shouted.

Following the gesture, I looked, and there, not a hundred yards away, was the blackness of a high reaching coastline. Despite the gloom of the night, its rugged outline was plainly visible.

But it was not the sight of this strange land alone that held my stare. One cliff rose above the others, and high on top of this towering bluff was a mighty castle, its massive portals agleam with countless lights that shimmered and sparkled through the rain.

"Neil!"

I turned quickly at the sound of that dear voice. There, emerging from the stairway, was Carol Terry, pale and frightened, with disheveled hair and clothing, but alive, thank God, alive!

"You are safe!" she cried, running quickly toward me. "Oh my darling, you are really safe!"

Two slender arms encircled my neck, as her tremulous face looked anxiously into mine.

"How I have hoped, how I have prayed that they would spare you! Doctor Zola had assured me that you were unharmed, but, of course, I could not believe him. I can hardly believe my own eyes even now. Oh my darling!"

She put her head on my shoulder and cried softly.

"I have been quite safe, dear," I assured her, as I held her slender body closely, "safe and unharmed. You must not trouble yourself with such needless worries."

Gently she disengaged herself from my arms, then slowly pushing me from her and holding my hands in hers, spoke in a soft earnest manner:

"God alone knows what these men will do, or what our own fate shall be. I realize, dear, that this is a time when a smiling face is needed more than a trembling chin. Forget my silly little cry. It will not be repeated, I promise."

"I have never worried on that score, Carol," I answered, giving the tiny hands a squeeze of encouragement. "My one hope is that I may be able to show one-half the courage I know you will."

SILENTLY we stood on the rain-drenched deck, looking over the desolate waters to the great castle that loomed so high above us. A cold, penetrating wind had risen, and the swaying branches of the trees at the bluff's edge seemed like ghastly arms, frantically waving us from this massive palace of gloom.

Somewhere within that vast structure was the answer to all this mystery, the solution for all our queries. As to what future we might find within those frowning portals, I could only guess.

Carol turned suddenly. "Bob! Where

is Bob? Neil, we have forgotten my brother."

"But *I* have not, *Mademoiselle,*" came an oily voice from behind. "Like Monsieur Bryant, he has been held somewhat against his will," continued Zola, "but in no way harmed or molested. I have, you will recall, mentioned that fact several times. Presently I shall have him freed, and then one of the small boats can row us ashore. We must not keep our host waiting."

Fifteen minutes later we had landed on the sandy beach, and were climbing a long series of winding stone steps that led to the top of the steep cliff. Doctor Zola headed the silent procession, followed by the great Zena. Behind them, in single file, came the liberated Bob, with Carol and me, while four Arab sailors brought up the rear.

Reaching the top step, we emerged into a fairyland of beauty. The dazzling loveliness of the scene almost baffled description. To the wondering eyes of us three strangers, it appeared unreal, as though we had been suddenly transplanted to a distant world of dreams. Wordless, we could but stare at its unbelievable grandeur.

Stately trees on a well-kept terrace glowed crimson and gold from the soft beams of oriental lanterns, while higher above, countless glass balls, gleaming blue, yellow and bright red, glittered from among the branches. Lights! Lights! Shimmering brightness everywhere. Numerous delicate streamers of pink and emerald bulbs twinkled through the dismal mists, clearly illuminating the spacious pathways that led to an elaborate marble fountain.

"It's lovely," gasped Carol. "So wondrously lovely!"

Before us, at a distance, rose the great castle itself, toward whose frowning portals we were now led. At the massive entrance stood two armed sentinels—the first sight of inhabitancy we had seen in this weirdly beautiful land. Our coming had been expected. Quickly one of them swung open the mighty bronze engraved door, and acting on a word from Zola, we followed him into the mysterious fortress.

Down a long hallway of marble pillars we made our silent way, coming at length to an enormous room of strange, barbaric beauty. Its golden cornices, its painted walls and ceilings, together with the costly rugs and tapestries, plainly showed it to be the reception hall of this towering palace of wonders.

Doctor Zola turned toward us. How insignificant, how small we must have appeared to his sardonic eye, as we stood so helpless before him in those age-old halls of time.

"I am to leave you now for a short while. You will await my return. Do not be so foolhardy as to leave or to attempt an escape during my absence," he warned. "The result can only be disastrous."

"It is all so puzzling, Neil," Carol exclaimed with a quizzical smile, after the physician had left us. "If only I could understand the meaning of it all!"

"I do," spoke up the practical Bob, whom nothing could greatly frighten or surprize. "It means we have fallen into the hands of a balmy lot, who are trying to re-enact some scenes from the *Arabian Nights* with us as the principal characters."

"Let us hope it is nothing more serious than that," I said. "During the past six days I have hazarded a thousand guesses as to what it's all about, yet I am still as much puzzled regarding their intentions

as the moment I first stepped on board the *Star of Egypt*."

Bob Terry nodded toward the four sailors, who were regarding us suspiciously.

"Less than useless to question them, I suppose?"

"Quite," I agreed. "Doubtless they themselves do not know, and if they did, hot irons could not force it from them. No, I am afraid we will have to wait till the powers that be choose to enlighten us."

"Then there is nothing we can do till that time comes," spoke Carol gently. "But it's comforting to know that my two men received courteous treatment. As for myself, no queen could have had more careful attention. The only loss was the misplacement of my wrist watch—misplaced, or stolen."

She held up her small white wrist on which the tiny C mark showed plainly. "And now I have nothing to hide my identity," she smiled.

"If we are fortunate enough to ever see Southampton again, there will be another," I promised. "A gold one, a solid gold one."

"Inlaid with diamonds as a special gift from me," put in Bob with boyish eagerness.

Further conversation was cut short by the sudden appearance of Zola. For once the Frenchman had dropped his serenity. The dark face appeared harassed and excited, while the usually firm voice now spoke in a halting, uncertain manner.

"You will follow—yes, you will come with me." He paused to wipe his moist brow with a silken handkerchief, although the night was cool. "The Master will not see you till tomorrow—God alone knows why. Some word, some false rumor, perhaps, must have reached his ears. But you are to come with me. Rooms have been prepared for you."

Up the grand staircase, then on through a pair of folding doors we followed the Frenchman, to halt at last in a long, broad corridor.

"You, Mademoiselle Terry, will occupy that chamber, your brother the adjoining one. Monsieur Bryant will have the goodness to use the room at the far end of the hall? You may be assured as to your safety. For the next twenty-four hours at least, the halls of Karamour will be a luxurious haven. But again"—he raised a forbidding hand—"again let me warn you of the folly to escape. This passage as well as the grounds below will be patrolled by native soldiers with orders to shoot on sight."

"And this master of yours?" asked Bob. "We are to see him tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow night without fail," replied Zola. "The great honor is to be yours. Meanwhile, rest, and I will have fresh clothes supplied you. Your appearance must be only the best when meeting the ruler. A good sleep, with a bath and clean wearing apparel, should work wonders."

Bidding good-night to the Terrys, and with promises of a quick reunion, I was taken to a spacious bedroom, where, despite the dark mystery and strangeness of my surroundings, I was soon lost in a deep slumber.

EARLY morning sun rays, shining through the open window in golden splendor, awakened me. From without, mingled with the cool murmur of the sea, came the sharp clip of a gardener's shears. Lying in the great bed I leisurely inspected the surroundings of my room. Its grandeur was almost unbelievable. Large oriental paintings, so wondrously real one might have plucked at the colored fruits, adorned the marble walls in artistic design. Long fluttering dra-

peries of silken softness clung from the windows. The air was sweet with perfume, while to the left, a heavy door, slightly ajar, showed an immaculately gleaming, modern bathroom.

Rising, I dressed, then going to the large glass door, made my way to the tiny balcony beyond.

Beneath, three black gardeners were busy trimming the green hedges that encircled the terrace, while several others sprinkled the lawn. Slender paths of glistening white limestone cut through the many tall trees like winding white serpents. Here was nothing to suggest the desolate, sand-encircled West African coast. To all appearances it might have been the well-kept estate of some enormously wealthy English gentleman.

In the distance, far below me, lay the blue Atlantic. Floating gracefully on the rolling waters of the little land-locked harbor was the *Star of Egypt*, while from the sandy shore of the beach, several small rowboats had put forth toward the sturdy little yacht.

As I stood looking at the tranquil scenes below, a negro entered the room with breakfast, while a second brought fresh wearing-apparel; immaculate white ducks, shirt, tie, a dark blue coat, and lastly, that which is ever most essential to the masculine toilet—a razor.

"The *Bwana* will stay in his room during the hours of light," said the first. "Later, we will come again, but he must not leave till summoned. After the dusk will come the voice that takes him to the Master."

"Who is he you call the Master?" I asked, regarding the speaker intently, "and why should he wish to see me?"

The negro shook his head in a violent, frightened gesture.

"No, *Bwana!* No! It is not for Utumba to say. He knows not the thoughts or reasons of the great one. He but obeys without question the orders of his ruler. The *Bwana*, then, will be ready for the call?"

Plainly this ignorant fellow knew nothing that could help. To question him further would be but futile.

"You may tell him whom you serve that I will be here when he wants me."

I spent the greater part of the day on the small balcony that overlooked the great terrace. Several times I caught glimpses of armed Arab guards, and once, from the lovely gardens beneath, floated a silvery feminine laugh. Below in the tiny harbor the *Star of Egypt* still rode the waves.

It was late that night before I was taken from the room. A broad-shouldered negro servant in picturesque costume came to summon me, and I was again conducted to the great reception hall. Here once more I found Carol, with Bob, a few grave-visaged Arabs, and Zola.

"You will now," began the Frenchman, "attentively listen to my every word. It may be that some of them will help you to understand and appreciate that which you are about to behold. Repeatedly have I been asked why you were brought to this strange shore. Always I have denied you the slightest knowledge as to this action. The reason for my silence is simple. I had been ordered—I had my commands from the highest—to tell nothing. Now, however, I may give you a brief outline.

"You have been taken for a purpose, and that purpose you must fulfill. The action of the next few hours has been thirty-four centuries in the making. Resign yourselves, therefore, to that one thought. To think of thwarting one

word of the great one is itself a sacrilege. We are here but to serve him. It is the law. Any action against either him or his commands will be punished by a death unthinkable! Speak only if he questions you, and be precise in your answers. Do not anger or in any way disagree with him. Ten thousand hells could not be so disastrous. There, I have warned you. Let it suffice. Come!"

To the far end of the mighty hall we followed Doctor Zola. Here was a door, a massive folding-door before which two almost naked negroes stood guard, each armed with a gleaming, two-handed sword.

Doctor Zola paused before that great barrier.

"And now, prepare yourselves for the strangest sight your eyes can ever hope to see. Make ready also for an honor, the greatness of which but few humans could dream! Hear me! Your poor brains, that have known only the sham and gaudiness of the Twentieth Century, are now to be blasted by an unbelievable vision of the eternal one, and of Time's most glamorous woman."

The piercing voice rose suddenly to a fanatical shriek.

"Men of the outer world, behold—Prince Karamour!"

The weird and amazing occurrences that take place in the hall of the talking heads, and the fate in store for the three prisoners, will be told in the fascinating chapters of this story in next month's WEIRD TALES. Reserve your copy now at your magazine dealer's.

Ultimate

By EDGAR DANIEL KRAMER

Rich man or poor man—
  What does it matter?
Solomon, Solon
  Or a mad hatter,
There is one ending
  That we all know,
The quiet shadows
  Where the worms go.

Lazarus, Dives,
  Poverty, riches,
Men with God's wisdom,
  Fools in the ditches,
Have the same ending—
  When their breaths pass,
They live in flowers,
  Trees and green grass.

"Destroy the Rose—and the powers of the Demon with it."

Duar the Accursed

By CLIFFORD BALL

A surprizing tale about the Black Tower and the intrusion therein of a barbarian adventurer—a strange weird tale of the love of a queen for her enemy

NIONE of the Krall Dynasty, ruler of Ygoth, for all her lithe beauty of rounded limbs, sat on her throne like a man, with an elbow resting on crossed knees and knuckles under chin. Before her a ring of guards surrounded a bareheaded man of great stature whose bronze, half-naked body was loaded down with heavy chains. Many scars and sword-cuts testified to the difficulty of his capture. The man stood insolently gazing over the Queen's head at the purple and

gold of the tapestries as though something of great interest held his attention to their scarlet colors. The fair occupant of the throne, accustomed to bended knees and supplications, was rapidly losing her temper.

"Speak, dog!" she cried. "Find your tongue, or by Krall I'll have my torturers find it with the plucking-tongs!"

At last the captive deemed it best to answer. He did not hurry. His gaze wandered slowly from the walls to the guards, from the guards to the chains on his limbs, at which he stared as though in surprized discovery, and finally to the enraged features of Queen Nione of Ygoth.

"Faith," he said, and his tone was slurred and deep, "by the look of you you'd be a better warrior than a man's mistress!"

Around him his chains rattled as the guards gave nervous starts. The two women-slaves crouching at the foot of the dais turned as pale as their brown skins would permit. Queen Nione lost all of her regal bearing and some of her dignity.

"I am no man's mistress!" she shrieked like any fish-wife. "But you will learn before long who I am, creature! I'll brand my name on you with letters of fire!"

"And I'll carry it a long way, Your Majesty," interrupted the undaunted captive. A slight curl of his firm lips belied any humility.

"Only to the slave galleys, dog!" taunted Nione. "I see by the marks on your back you are not unacquainted with them. You've felt the weight of the lash before."

"Sure. And I've felt the weight of a crown, too, but perhaps a little less heavily, for the mark of it seems to be gone."

The prisoner smiled with a flash of white teeth that split the tanned grimness of his countenance like a beam of light over a dark battlefield. One of the guards jerked impatiently on a chain. The smile faded as the captive gave his captor a level stare holding the threat of death behind calm blue eyes. The guard shuffled his feet nervously until Queen Nione, watching the byplay, chose to become expressive.

"Fools! What have I in my guardsmen? Dancing-girls from Nyema?

"Three of them danced into Hell but a little while ago," muttered the chained man.

"What is your name, O Mighty One?" mocked Nione.

"Men call me Duar."

The Queen of Ygoth relaxed on her cushioned throne as a wave of surprize swept the clouds of anger from her face. She raised one hand unconsciously to suddenly pallid features. If the guardsmen had been startled before, now they were certainly in panic, much as if they had captured one of the terrible white apes from the hills of Barsoom and were unable to let it go. Backing to the extreme limits of the chains they held, they attempted to go still farther without endangering themselves or their Queen by entirely releasing the iron bonds. Duar was forced to extend his arms as the chains threatened to pull him asunder.

"I see, Nione," he grimaced, "that even in this barbarous country men have heard of me." He shook his long mane of black hair impatiently. "Tell these jackals to ease my wrists before I tangle their bones in my fetters."

NIONE motioned wordlessly. The guards stepped cautiously nearer to leave slack in the weights; but one careful fellow placed his unsheathed sword-tip to the back of Duar's neck and held it there.

"I bring your person no harm, Nione,"

continued the prisoner, "nor harm to your subjects. The three I killed I was forced to when they attacked me in the mountain pass. Faith, it's a fine welcome you give to visitors to your kingdom!"

"Duar, the Accursed!" breathed Nione. "What demon brings you here?"

"No demon, O Queen. Merely my roving inclinations."

"Demons have always prompted your inclinations, O Duar! Even in this secluded mountain kingdom have we heard of your familiars from Hell! Whence came the red rain of blood that covered the battlefield of Kor and blinded the eyes of the Sivian hosts while your followers cut them to ribbons? And where the giant black raven that flew above your pirate galley when you ravished the coasts of Krem? Why did the mountains of Fuvia shatter themselves over your castles while the mighty hurricane destroyed your villages and your fields as the raging seas finally obliterated the whole of the kingdom King Duar had raised with his pirate hordes? Why, O King who is now a slave?"

"Faith, and I know not," he answered. "Mine has been a strange life, it's true. Perhaps there is a destiny for me. I sometimes think that when I have swerved from the chosen path the Gods ordained, it is the very elements who rise to set me back. But I know little more than you. I have gone with the wind and the tide. When the Gods said I should be a king, I was, and a pirate I became likewise."

"It is easy to blame everything on the Gods!"

"Why not?" inquired the prisoner, and his white teeth flashed again. "I came to this world without asking, but if I leave it 'twill be no fault of mine."

"Aye, O King and pirate and slave! Whence did you come? What far-off country saw your birth, you who have the height of the mountain men, the thin nostrils of the horesmen of Kor, the black hair of the cavemen, the blue eyes of those who haunt the islands of the seas, and the swift strength of the dwellers of the plains? In all of our world there has never been born such a composite prodigy of nature. Or are you of our world? A demon, perhaps, in the guise of man? You were never a child—to human knowledge. Even the seers can trace you no farther back than your first battles, and your history is not in the stars. Whence?"

"Again I am ignorant, Nione."

The captive's eyes were pensive and his brow furrowed in thought. The ruler of Krall gazed at his features watchfully, but some of the sternness was gone from her face and only the slaves and the wide-eyed guardsmen noticed the easy familiarity with which the prisoner ignored the rightful titles of their Queen. The highest member of the court would have had his tongue torn from its roots for using such a form of address to the Queen of Ygoth.

"My first memories are of the clash and ring of metal upon metal in the heat of a great battle and sweat and blood on my face as I called our battle-cry. I was a mercenary on the field of Sate fighting in the service of the fool King Tærus, whom later I had the satisfaction of spitting on my sword."

"Over a dancing-girl!" concluded the Queen spitefully, and sniffed.

The captive shrugged but remained silent.

Nione contemplated the swordsman through half-closed eyes. Calmly he returned her gaze, and something in the depths of his fierce blue eyes caused her pulse to beat a little faster, and a faint flush tinged her alabaster cheeks.

"If," she asked finally, irritated at these signs of weakness in her august person, "my guards should conduct you in safety to the limits of my borders, on

any side you desire, would you go—peacefully?"

Again Duar shrugged and the chains rattled. "Perhaps," he said. "Perhaps—not."

"You fool!" cried Nione, now crimson. "I am giving you your life! Know you I could have you impaled, torn apart, killed a thousand ways! I grant you mercy and you care nothing?"

"Mercy? For what? For defending myself from onslaught? From cruelty? Your eyes belie the name you seek to frighten with!" He sighed. "Almost I wish I were a king again!"

"Throw him into the Pits!" screamed the outraged ruler of Ygoth. "And—and put extra chains on him!"

As the guards led their captive away, the foremost stepping hastily before the long strides of the prisoner, Duar called mockingly back over his shoulder: "Beware, O Queen Nione, lest the red rain come and the black raven perch on the turrets of your castles!"

One of the guards dropped his end of the chain, whereat the captain, to hide his own fears, kicked him lustily as he stooped to recover it.

Nione stared, white-faced, as a peal of laughter rolled back from the dark corridor.

THE Pits of Ygoth, far beneath the turrets and spires of the fair city above, reeked of the staleness and corruption of centuries. Age-old dampness permeated the foul atmosphere; small creatures of this dank underworld scampered and scurried just beyond the torchlights of the guards. The clanking of Duar's chains, now multiplied until even his mighty frame staggered beneath their weight, awoke echoes now near, now far, until it seemed to the small body of men that they were intruding into the haunts of all the long-dead kings and warriors of ancient Krall and their lost souls were girding up rusty mail for ghostly conflict.

"This one will do." The captain's voice was harsh.

Duar was pushed through a rusty barred door and flung into a corner, the crash of his irons shattering the stillness of the Pits for a mile or more throughout their silent depths. His chains attached to corroded iron rungs on the wall, he lay watching the last glimmer of torchlight fade from the damp stones as the muffled footsteps of the guards died away down the passage. Darkness rushed in triumphant, clashing against his eyeballs with almost physical impact.

The man who had been a king smiled into the black inferno. A memory of the alabaster features of Nione rose before him and the smile became a grin. He moved into a slightly dryer corner of the cell and stretched out his legs as comfortably as possible, removing some object that felt like a dried shinbone from beneath his spine. His chains grew quiet again. Something scuttled past the doorway and he had an impression of tiny, gleaming red eyes.

Duar slept.

HE AWOKE with a sense of uneasiness, akin to the disturbed nerves of a jungle animal before approaching peril; not as a civilized man, drowsy from deep slumber, but instantly, fully cognizant of his surroundings and predicament. Only a slight twitching of his sword-arm answered his first nervous impulse to reach for the weapon that was not there.

Silence and everlasting night reigned where the cleanliness of the sun had never shone. Duar's straining eyes met only blankness and told his tense figure nothing, but his ears gave proof that even the scamperings and rustlings had stilled, and sub-consciously he knew some alien presence had frightened them away—a

presence without sound, but his heart and brain and whatever intangible part of him men called the soul were clamoring a nerve-shattering alarm.

Suddenly tiny molecules of light flickered in the black chaos before him, twisting and tumbling in a circular area like separate parts, as if each held a tiny life of its own. They spread no beams to reveal the rude chamber; outside of their small circumference the dungeon remained as dark as ever, but within the whirling area of infinitesimal sparks an unearthly glow became brighter and brighter.

Duar had seen sorcery before over half the world, even in the black mountains of his own forbidding kingdom before the great walls fell to bury it for ever from the sight of man, but some intuition told him he was confronted by a hitherto unwitnessed demonstration. This, thought he, was a witch-fire. He sat quietly; he had not once moved a limb from the moment he awoke.

A voice came from the light, a sweet, soft, woman's voice that nevertheless, in spite of its obvious femininity, held undertones of power.

"Duar!" it called. "Duar! Do you hear, O Duar?"

"I hear you, devil," growled the man in chains. "What wizardry is this, you spawn of Hell, and what do you want of me?"

"Duar, my lord!" The scintillating area of light, if the unnatural glow could be described as light, expanded until it was nearly eight feet in diameter. The dethroned king felt terrific forces struggling in wild efforts for freedom there before him, but though the outlines of the circle quivered and writhed they held fast to their shape. Somehow the captive knew he should be glad that this was so; his barbarian blood felt the touch of fear.

"Duar, beloved, have you forgotten my voice in these few short eons?"

"What talk is this of love and eons?" growled the beleaguered man. "Faith, and I've never known the two to be associated outside of song! And if I had free hands with a sword in them I'd see what cold steel would find in that fire-ball of yours, demon or succuba, or whatever you are!"

"Perhaps if you saw me you would remember," said the sweet tones. "I had hopes——"

The center of the fire grew dim and blurred as a maid's breath blurs her mirror. Slowly, by degrees, appeared the face and figure of a woman—or a Thing resembling a woman.

"In the Name of——" gasped Duar, shocked from his philosophic calm at last.

"Nay, do not name the lesser Gods, O Duar," counseled the figure. "Rather, call on Him Whom you have the right to call on, the God of Gods, the Ancient One Who is older than the earth or men, He of Whom *you* were the high priest!"

The words only half penetrated the captive's mind. He was staring at a vision that within the innermost chambers of his mind he knew could not have been born of human flesh. Her form was incased in one long robe of shimmering white, a robe of strange weave and texture to Duar's astonished eyes, held by a black girdle at the waist. The perfect figure beneath the single garment was obvious in every line and curve up to the white column of the shapely throat and the queenly contour of face and brow. Her raven-black hair fell in a long cascade over the proudly held shoulders. In the depths of her dark, hypnotic eyes swam all the black suns of the universe in a constant play of ebony light. Neither flaw nor blemish marred the ivory perfection of her features. Beauty incarnate in the Pits of Ygoth!

"Do you remember yet, O Duar?" she of the fire was asking. "Can you recall—the Name?"

The barbarian warrior who had never flinched before man or beast or devil placed his hands over his face and crouched in the corner of his dungeon as a thousand wild memories and desires crashed at his brain—*from within!* The walls of the Pits seemed to shake, the very earth to tumble from its balance; great winds from the outer voids pulled and tore at his body. Or was it *his* body, this form composed of flesh and blood that called itself Duar? For an instant he and the figure in white were high among the stars in the infinity of space, and earth and men and kingdoms were no more. He was about to see, to comprehend, some great knowledge.

Suddenly the universe began to spin. A black cloud from nowhere enveloped his brain and it became a blank thing. He was back in the Pits of Ygoth with a whirling light and the Thing that was too beautiful to be a woman.

"Failure, O Ancient One!" the voice was saying. "Again I have come too soon! How many more eons must your servant wait? How many more earths must crumble and suns grow cold before he remembers Shar, this poor earth-bound spirit that was once your greatest worshipper? Then, and then only, with his aid and the knowledge which is locked in his spirit, I may resurrect the truths so that your greatness and our elder race will prevail once more! How long?"

KING DUAR, now released from the power waves that had enmeshed his mind, became his bold self again. He set his eyes fiercely on the shining form, and although his limbs still shook from the internal holocaust he spoke bravely.

"Curse these hell-haunted dungeons where a man cannot even die in peace! And curse your chattering, woman—if woman you are! If I had but freedom and a sword——"

"Pity, O Duar! I never gave pity to anyone else, and the feeling of it is strange. You, who could have all the kingdoms of the world—yes, and of other worlds—and all you want is a sword!"

"With a sword I cut my own kingdom!" boasted Duar, undaunted. "With a sword I could cut your throat!"

"Poor Duar, housing a spirit too great for himself! Do you ever dream you are not as other men? That once, long ago, you were one of the Masters? I trailed you across time, O little man——"

"Little man!" exploded the fuming barbarian, his rage bursting all mental bonds and carrying away his power of coherent speech in a red torrent of madness.

"Losing the world and caring naught," said she of the light. "Losing a kingdom and caring naught. Losing liberty—all for the sake of the Rose of Gaon!"

The prisoner ceased to rattle his chains in his frenzy. With great gulps of the foul air he stifled the madness in his blood.

"How did you know that?" he whispered harshly. "How did you know what only I, the only living man on earth, had knowledge of?"

The figure smiled at him. "The only living—yes. But I am Shar, who knows everything save the knowledge locked in your spirit that belongs to another greater than common men, the knowledge of the high priest you once were and which you do not know you possess."

"Indeed you are a demon," grunted Duar.

"No demon. You have forgotten the arts. Demons are my slaves. It is a demon who guards the Rose of Gaon in the northwestern tower of Ygoth. If you

must, go strike him down. Maybe combat with the evil forces will shrink this human flesh of yours and the true spirit will escape to join me and end my quest. Perhaps! Even I, Shar, cannot tell! Go."

"Go?" roared Duar. "You may go, you devil sent here from Hell to torture me! You may be as beautiful as the Devil's mistress, but if I could get my fingers on that white neck of yours——"

He rattled the mocking chains in an agony of despair.

"Those?" Shar smiled.

Suddenly a portion of the light circle broke away from the revolving main mass, and darting like a flash of steel in campfire light it touched the heavy chains on the prisoner's body. Amazed, the barbarian leapt to his feet as a hundred severed links of iron that had been his fetters clattered about his ankles.

"Go," said Shar, "to the Rose of Gaon and the demon in the tower. I will be watching, my lord, even as when I blinded your enemies in battle and guided your ship at sea. Perhaps even Time will relent its waywardness!"

Abruptly Duar stood alone in the blackness of the Ygoth Pits.

"Accursed witch!" he exclaimed aloud. "Rescue it may be, but no good will come of it! In another hour or two Nione would have been curious enough to send for me. Now where in the name of the Seven Gods is that door?"

The Queen of Krall braided her golden hair in preparation for retirement to the royal bed and smiled an appreciative commendation to her reflection in the jewel-studded mirror. She was fully aware of her beauty and exercised it on occasions before visiting diplomats. Before the nobles of her own court she retained the masculine manners of her dead father, and although she knew they penetrated her bruskness, she cared little. In her judgment there was no one in the kingdom of Ygoth fit to share the double throne.

As she completed the last plait and thrust the braids back, a vision arose before her of the statuesque adventurer she had that day committed to the Pits. He *was* a handsome man; obviously interesting. A bold warrior, also, with a hundred legends to his record. Apparently a temper to match her own. Her thoughts strayed. If *he* had been a noble of the court instead of the vagrant, dispossessed ruler of a buried kingdom! . . . A tinge of pink embellished her fair complexion. Nione, thinking like a courtezan!

Suddenly her eyes grew wide with terror and the blush became a pallor as reflected movement in the glass surface showed billowings in the draperies. Someone had entered, unannounced, the sacred precinct that was the bedchamber of the Queen. Her personal handmaiden had already been dismissed; the guardsmen outside would never have had the temerity to enter unless an alarm had been given. What danger stalked here? Assassination?

In spite of the trembling in her limbs and the pounding heart beneath her flimsy night attire, regal Nione of Ygoth spoke in a calm, authoritative voice: "What coward comes skulking in the dark?"

"One who resents the appellation, Your Majesty," replied Duar, stepping through the portieres, and still damp from the dungeons. His right hand held a sword, unsheathed.

However the apparition of a vengeful prisoner released in her boudoir may have affected Nione, there seemed to be more color to her cheeks and a returned ease to her posture as she swung to face him. In her heart she knew here was no assassin.

"Apparently my Pits are not deep enough!"

"Nor would be the pits of Hell if I wished to view Your glorious Majesty!"

"Nor my guards strong enough!"

"Nor guards, nor swords——"

"Whence came the one you hold?" asked the Queen, pointing to the bright blade Duar held at rest.

"The guard without, my Queen, is now without his sword." Again the white teeth flashed. "I was hungry and I could not find the kitchens. But as I wandered about, marveling at the splendor—and the inhospitality—of so magnificent a Queen, I perceived before these doors a certain belligerent person who rudely accosted me. When he became vicious I was forced to relieve him of his weapon. I trust his skull is not so badly cracked; I but wished to pacify his war-like inclinations."

Nione interrupted with a gale of silvery laughter. Her merriment, the thrown-back head and pulsing throat, momentarily swept his senses with a surge of admiration. Whatever Shar was, she might be, but here was something human!

"You burst the heaviest chains in my deepest Pits, find your way through endless corridors, wander through my halls at will and, unarmed, smite down one of the best warriors in my kingdom to force your way into the chambers of the Queen where no man has trod in years—then you apologize!"

She rocked in unqueenly mirth.

"You—are not afraid?" he asked softly.

"Of Duar? No! I know your history—the part known to men—too well! You are no evil ravisher or torturer of women. Of Duar the Accursed—perhaps—a little! There may be demons in your shadow I care not to see!"

"Then in the Names of the Gods, get me something to eat!" swore the ex-captive. "I starve, woman!"

He flung the sword carelessly on the silken coverlets of the royal couch.

A DROWSY hand-maid, eyes still blurred from sleep, appeared in answer to the imperial summons on the bell-rope. Evidently she surmised the outstretched guard at the portals was in a state of slumber instead of unconsciousness, for her features registered no alarm until they espied the giant form of the adventurer sprawled in a royal chair. To her fear-stricken eyes and gaping mouth Nione said: "Food, immediately, for myself—you understand? And if you breathe one word you go back to slavery! Hasten."

"Or I slit your throat!" added Duar lazily.

The startled servant vanished in a whirlwind of terror.

"I ordered food for you in the cells," stated the Queen, ominously. "Were my guards afraid to serve it?"

"I did not like the banquet hall," observed the late captive. He regarded her through lowered eyelids. Was this ready acquiescence some feminine trick?

When the food arrived, Duar commanded the slave to sit on a divan in the corner. He trusted little to a servant's tongue, fearful or not, and if he perceived the sigh of relief Nione emitted over the enforced chaperonage, he chose not to comment on it. When the tender meat of the fowl's flesh was devoured and washed down by the white wine of Ygoth's slopes, he shoved away the serving-tray and reached for the sword he had won.

"And now?" questioned the hostage Queen.

"We pay a visit, *you* and I, to the object of my visit—a rare jewel, if truth be told. And perhaps a demon."

"A—a demon?"

"Aye. The plagued land appears to be

surfeited with them. Faith, I've for ever expected them, never to find them, and found them where I never expected. But this night I have been made certain by good authority. Nione, if a thing was stolen from you that you never knew you possessed, or counted among the values of your kingdom, would it be robbery?"

The Queen was mystified and a little angered, as puzzled women so often are.

"You speak in riddles, O slave-king. Though you hold my person you cannot make a fool of me. Do you know there is not one chance in a million of your leaving Ygoth alive? And not one chance in ten million of your crossing the boundaries ? You have my person, Duar, but not my kingdom!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Duar meaningly, "a kingdom lacking a king."

Nione was hushed into apprehensive silence. The fear-stricken maid trembled in her corner. The erstwhile captive continued his narrow-eyed scrutiny and a nervous quiet reigned before he spoke again.

"Nione, have you ever heard of the Rose of Gaon?"

"I have fed you and offered you freedom but I will not guess at your riddles!"

"Spitfire! Have you heard of the Black Tower of Ygoth?"

The Queen shuddered. "Who has not, O Duar? The most feared spot in all my land, shunned by all! Would I could destroy it, but the ancient laws and the commands of the priests forbid. My subjects avert their gaze as they pass, and even the birds of the air will not circle above those ominous turrets. What seek you in the Black Tower?"

"Fortune! Power to raise a kingdom once more!"

"A kingdom from the lost souls of dead murderers?"

"Aye. I know of your customs. If a man, or a woman at times, commits a crime so foul that they cannot even be awarded the punishment of a clean death by sword or of slow starvation in the Pits, the ancient law of Ygoth ordains the priests shall march them to the entrance of the Black Tower. There they are left to some inevitable and horrible doom; inevitable, for they never return from beyond the grim portals. The secrets of the Tower are lost in antiquity. Only the legends of your priests, who themselves have never entered, hint at the unknown fates of the condemned who were driven within the walls. A calloused criminal may laugh at the sword, but no human heart will fail to beat a litle faster at the threat of the unknown danger."

"They say," whispered Nione, "the Black Tower stood alone when all this land was barren and my forefathers who founded the dynasty of Krall were yet unborn! It is a hateful place where even a shrub or vine will not crawl from the earth. I care not to look upon it."

"And dim the glory of your eyes," commented Duar pleasantly. "Yet this night we visit therein."

"We? Do you think you can drag *me* there, of all places, like a common wench?"

"Or carry. You are my password. Ygoth is too well patrolled, by your own word, even for me."

"The first guard we meet will imprison you!"

"Not with the ring of Nione before his eyes—and a whisper or two. He will elevate his eyebrows as we pass and comment to himself that even a Queen must have diversions."

Nione's cheeks flamed. "Never! No man in all my kingdom would ever think so of me."

Duar laughed. "Men are always men, even when thinking of a Queen!"

"Beast! Slave! Barbarian!"

"For the moment, 'King.' But to con-

tinue. An unfrocked priest, dying on a battlefield, told me of a jewel called the Rose of Gaon that lay within the walls of the Black Tower of Ygoth, a jewel magnificent in size and beauty. He said that I, being Duar the Accursed, could pass in safety through the chamber of the hopeless dead who have been condemned there and claim the stone. He was a vengeful creature and I believe he meant to send me to my death even as he lay dying. Perhaps he did, for here I am. Now you know why I came to Ygoth. If the words he spoke were true, with that jewel I could buy enough men to conquer a new kingdom. Slave I may have been, but there is royal blood in my veins and I cannot rest unless I am a king!"

His last words were delivered in such impassioned tones that the servant girl was hardly able to stifle a scream. Nione's gaze searched the depths of his blue eyes and moved on to wander over the scars of his ragged person.

"It seems," she observed, "the Queen is dethroned. But I have my pride—and courage. My guards will not break down the doors to find me screaming like a street-wench in your arms. Maid, bring cloaks!"

"I wonder," mused Duar aloud, "if you'd scream."

Twice in their journey through the streets they were halted by an inquisitive night patrol, but each time the sight of the Queen's personal ring gave them free passage and each time Duar chuckled quietly at the amazed expressions on the faces of the captains confronted by the royal seal. The second time, as the patrol with its dim hand-lights passed on, he laughed aloud. Nione deliberately kicked his shin in a most unqueenly manner.

"If a Queen is ridiculed, no one laughs!" she reminded him fiercely.

"You are the most marvelous of Queens!" swore Duar devotedly.

At the northwestern corner of the city of Ygoth, where the ancient walls rose against the invaders of centuries ago and the possible ones of tomorrow, stood the Black Tower, alone in all its majestic solitude, with no other building or dwelling to share its vicinity. No one cared to live within the shadows of its evil memories. Once in a decade the feet of men approached its portals carrying some drugged wretch to be cast inside the doors that stood always open, like the gates of Hell; some creature in the form of man who had committed a monstrous crime. What horrible fate they met within or below the black walls no living soul ever knew, and only the priests guessed. None ever returned from the forbidding, evil tower whose ebony turrets rose against the pure sky like the clutching fingers of a demon from the lowest pits.

Once close to the grim walls the woman who was a Queen and the man who had been a king halted in silence to survey their goal. Not even a bat stirred the ghostly stillness. All was darkness, still and remote. Here in the shadow of the tower the moonlight was gone as if a hand from Hell had stricken the silvery orb from the heavens. A monument to the shadowy God of Death.

"Wait for me here, O Nione," said Duar. "If I come back I'll bring you a king's ransom—if I find you here to lead me again through the guards. If I find you not—I'll come through the guards alone and drape the dead demon over your palace walls!"

"My will prevailing, I will be here."

"I'll bring back a share of the Rose for you," promised Duar as he vanished into the night. An answering whisper came from behind, momentarily checking his stride: "Bring back yourself, O Duar!"

At the threshold, where the great dark portals swung wide, he paused in a fruitless attempt to peer down the long flight of carven steps he knew lay before him. The dim reflection of moonlight showed only the gaping entrance and the rubble and debris of passing centuries; the time-worn descent to unknown punishment was blotted from the eye. Barbarian though he was, Duar muttered a prayer to the Seven Gods before he descended the topmost step, after which he ventured downward, surely the only man in eons to come upright and not falling in screaming terror from the hands of executioner priests.

He counted the steps. One hundred, one hundred and fifty—how far into the earth did they go? He cursed his lack of foresight in not bringing a torch. A minute later his outthrust foot struck level floor and he felt his way cautiously along a damp wall, testing each step lest he cast himself into an unseen pit. The wall was carven curiously; after feeling some of the figures beneath his fingertips he was almost glad he had neglected a torch.

Abruptly he felt the Force. It struck him, body and face, like a blast of hot wind from the deserts. First obstructing, then suddenly altering, it impeded his progress little as it seemed to hurry him onward. He became conscious he was almost running in a desperate effort to keep up with the passage of the air, or Force.

"By the Gods!" he muttered through set teeth. "This is an undignified way to receive me into Hell!"

The passage ended with startling suddenness; he was in a great chamber lit by a ruddy glow. The glow came from an object lying upon a huge stone, carved as a perfect square and resting in the exact center of the great circular hall. Duar advanced cautiously with drawn sword toward the source of the light. Several times he stumbled clumsily over irregular heaps of rubbish on the floor, and once it seemed to him he only managed to keep from falling by the intentness of his gaze on the lurid fire before him.

Now he was wading, like one who crosses a mountain torrent breast-high, and the Force was roaring in his ears until his temples hurt. It pressed on his head and shoulders, inexorably, urging him to lie down and rest. Tearing his eyes from the glory of the light, he glanced about, seeking a level spot on which to relax. The horror he beheld smote his weary brain back to activity. He was treading over the *remains of countless skeletons!*

Here lay the answer of the destiny of the wretched culprits condemned to the Black Tower. Hundreds upon hundreds of them, back through the centuries, had been thrust down the dark stairway to feel the Force and hasten onward to their doom. Those who sat down to rest rested there for ever. An effort to retreat would be like forcing a stone wall with bare hands; the demon power was too strong. Always must the victim proceed to the light. The strength and will-power of each was denoted by the distance he or she covered toward the beckoning light before they succumbed to the baleful Force. The long-dead bones reflected dimly the weird glow of the goal they never had reached.

"A curse on you!" roared Duar through the deathly silence of the death chamber, before he realized he was cursing the object of his quest. For the light he approached was coming from the heart of the Rose of Gaon! It lay on a black table of stone, its size as large as Duar's clenched fist. A magnificent ruby of unnatural circumference, it shone clear

and glowing with a life of its own, shedding supernatural rays over the dead bones of the underground tomb; the ransom of a thousand kings, but so great in its dreadful power that no human could own it without sorcery. The barbarian king stood looking upon its baleful beauty, and even as his heart surged within his breast he knew it was not for him.

The demon Force struck him squarely. For the fraction of a second he was back on his heels as his sword cut only the thin air before him. Ferocious, snarling, the barbarian fought against an intangible substance he could not see, while the weight of the unknown Thing pressed about his throat until his breath came in uneven gasps. Furiously he cursed and struggled before the unseen power as weakness flowed into his veins and his muscles became lax with fatigue. His vision encompassed only the dim light of the jewel and the litter of decayed corpses about, but he battled an invisible monster of fangs and claws. Long red furrows appeared on his arms and chest, and brutal welts arose on his head and shoulders.

Duar, the king, knew he was beaten, but Duar the barbarian knew that only when he died he was dead. The primitive instinct kept him upright, thrusting into the dark cloud that had risen before him with a last desperate effort. Still, he recognized doom. No mortal man could withstand the powers of the demon of the Black Tower, and well he knew it. The end was inevitable; a barbarian king would join the corpses of the underground graveyard. So Duar slashed thin air with a useless weapon and prepared to die.

A FAINT glimmer of sparks in motion caught his eye. They appeared at his left elbow, not close enough to interfere with sword-play. Shar!

"I cannot fail you now, my lord," came the well-remembered tones he had heard in the Pits. "Even though you fight for that which is not yours and the body of another woman, I still support you and your childish desires. You cannot go in safety now unless you destroy the Rose—and the powers of the demon with it! Strike the Rose! Strike before the Hell-spawn destroys the spark in you which belongs to the Ancient One!"

The heavy, two-handed sword slashed into the very center of the baleful jewel reposing on its ebony pedestal. If a mountain had collapsed the thunder could have been no greater. Staggering, Duar perceived the precious fragments flying into a thousand disintegrated bits, while death winds blew into his face and the walls shook with their mad forces. Even the corpses seemed to rustle and stir as the elemental being that had guarded the Rose of Gaon departed the Black Tower for ever.

Bit by bit the skeletons were crumbling into dust, released from the eternal slavery of the fatal Rose. Through their shifting dust Duar stumbled toward the passageway. The shimmering form of his mystifying ally stood in his path; he halted, eager to depart but unwilling to desert even a sorceress in the loathsome chamber holding the remains of dead felons.

"I owe you thanks. My eyes were blinded like those who came before me. Alone, I would not have thought of striking the jewel."

"No mortal man could have touched that stone, O Duar! It was not even a jewel—but the heart of a demon. If the blood of the Elder Race did not flow in your veins you could never have approached so near to it."

"What is your interest in me, witch-

woman?" queried the barbarian, stubbornly. "Why did you free me in the Pits? I have no friends. I am Duar, the Accursed! I fight for no cause but my own, and my only power is the sword I hold!"

"You are mistaken!" Shar's voice rose to a higher pitch with the eloquence of her plea. Duar, you admit that, even to yourself, your life has been a mystery. I can explain the mystery and bring back to you your past, the age-old past when you were a priest of the Elders and all these peoples now inhabiting the earth were only things crawling in its mud. Of all the Elders I am the last. Only you, Duar, have some of the ancient blood, mixed with mankind's, in your human flesh. I watched you throughout your reincarnations until, at last, I determined to arouse your sub-consciousness to the point where you could remember. I need your help! You were a priest of the Race once —you can be again! We will rule again, with the aid of the ancient powers, supreme and undefeatable, over the entire world! Think, my lord! Remember!"

Once again the witch-fires burned in his brain, rose and swirled and fell, and when his brain revolted against the torture of their passage his sight was cleared. All he could recall was the haunted underground pit, dust-laden and befouled with cursed souls.

"I am Duar."

Shar sighed. "Go then, Duar. When you are reborn I will come again—and again! Some day——" Her voice grew dim.

Heedless, he rushed up the stone stairs, in the direction no man had ever trod, to where Nione waited in sobbing anxiety, up to where the kingdom of Ygoth lay before his regal eyes. He knew she waited for him, long before he saw her silhouetted against the moon as she placed a hesitant foot on the first of the steps leading to the unknown depths. Exultation flooded his heart. She had been willing to follow him to a nameless death! What more could a barbarian wish than a powerful kingdom and a beautiful Queen?

But there came a whisper to his ears as he emerged from the haunted tower, a thin, ghostly strain from the echoes of his past:

"O Duar, you fool! You who could have possessed the world, taking but one little kingdom for yourself!"

The Mark of the Monster

By JACK WILLIAMSON

A vivid thrill-tale of the black altar on the hill-top, and the dark doom that hung over two lovers like a living horror—by the author of "Golden Blood".

1. The Brooding Horror

BEYOND the miserable poverty of Creston, its squalid ignorance and its rotting antiquity, there is something more appalling—something that has always seemed to me like a colossal, invisible spider, gloating over the broken victims in its intangible, unbreakable web. I had escaped it once; now I dared it again to set free Valyne Kirk.

Brakes shrieking, the antiquated bus pitched down the rutted mountain road. Carrying away all the sanity of the modern world, it left me alone and oppressed amid the sinister shadows of the time-crushed village.

I shuddered, for I felt that Creston was the unhappy ghost of a town, sprawling dead in this desolate vale. Its narrow, high-peaked houses were bleached and gray as decaying skulls; their broken windows leered like vacant eyeholes at the gloomy, frowning hills.

The spirited young all have fled from Creston. No children laugh in the ancient, cobbled streets. And I found nothing new in the years since I had gone—unless it was this spirit of festering evil, come to haunt the old town's tomb.

Valyne Kirk had promised to meet me; for I had come with seven years' earnings, to take her away from Creston, for ever. Eagerly I looked for her, up and down the unkempt squalor of the narrow street. After seven years, the sweet memory of her burned still like a sacred flame within my soul. The picture of her quiet, violet-eyed face, framed in dark and shining hair, remained etched into my heart.

But she didn't come. And somber premonitions rose to cloud my joy. For in my pocket was that strange letter from Doctor Kyle, my aged adopted father. Upon my very heart was graven its puzzling and sinister warning:

> My son, you write that you are coming home to marry Valyne Kirk. I shall not, I dare not, tell you why—but may God in his mercy forbid that so monstrous a crime should be!
>
> Have you never felt the strangeness in you, Clay? Have you never sensed the stain upon your soul? Are you never conscious of the black venom flowing in your blood?
>
> Much as Sarah and I long to see you, we both prefer that you should live and die in your new foreign home, than that you should wed Valyne, and drench her life in terror.
>
> Heed this warning—you must sense its truth, like a cold serpent coiled around your heart! And accept all our congratulations upon your new prosperity.
>
> YOUR SECOND FATHER.

The ominous enigma of that message, woven into the strange memories of my youth, and my old nameless fears of hill-girdled Creston, still shrouded me with dread. But it had merely hastened my re-

"I know that you aren't madly selfish enough to drag Veyne to a living hell."

turn from the Orient. For if there were any real reason why I couldn't marry Valyne, then the toil and peril of seven years had been in vain.

She didn't meet me.

I walked up the cobbled street, past grim, silent houses that I had known when I was a child. Some hoary evil, I thought again, had come down out of the forests to haunt them, since I had gone.

Gaunt, hoary-headed men peered at me from sagging doors. I knew the names of some; but their dull, rheumy eyes returned my greetings with stares of hostile dread. Even haggard, one-eyed Dud Morrow, the postmaster, who must have handled all my letters to Valyne, and all of hers to me, did not know me until I spoke. Then he started and seemed to shrink from me, as if I had been afflicted with some fearful contagion.

"Valyne Kirk?" he mumbled hastily. "Why, since the old woman died in the summer, she lives at Doctor Kyle's house. Just half a mile up the hill."

He gestured as if to hasten me. And as I went on, I sensed a furtive murmur behind me in the narrow street, as if swift, unpleasant things were whispered.

Valyne had written of her mother's death, but not that she had gone to my foster-father's house. I wondered briefly at her silence.

Up the muddy road I hastened, through gnarled trees older than Creston, toward the house of Doctor Latham Kyle. No need to ask the way! I knew each turning, each battered oak, each moss-stained boulder. But I felt again that some secret evil had come down from the hills, to grasp this vale in tentacles of slithering horror.

An old, insidious fascination drew my eyes up the gloomy slopes of Blue Squaw Mountain. The tangled, monstrous trees of its forbidden fastness had filled my first nightmares. Often in childhood, driven by strange instinctive impulses that overcame my trembling fear, I had ventured into its immemorial wilderness. And once, in a desolate glade near the summit of the mountain, thick-walled with gnarled, gigantic trees, I had come upon a great circle of monolithic upright stones, that ringed a low stone altar black with fire and blood.

When I stood before that hidden sylvan altar, a singular, exhilarating terror had clutched my heart. I shook to the wakening of elder memories, more wonderful, more dreadful, than any I had known. Some savage compulsion made me kneel and strike my forehead against the altar stones until a jagged point was bright with blood.

But as soon as I left the circle of crude pillars, a frightened, utter revulsion had seized my sensitive, childish soul. Terrified and bewildered, I had run back to tell Doctor Kyle what I had found.

His thin lips had tightened strangely as he listened. The dark eyes deep beneath his shaggy brows had peered into mine, as if probing to my soul. Solemnly, his deep and hollow voice had warned:

"Son, if you want to save your life, your sanity, your soul, never go back to that circle of stones! And never tell another human being that you have found them. Forget. Promise me you will forget."

And I—then I must have been no older than six—I promised him. But I never forgot. I had never gone back; but that strange, instinctive dread clung still, a web of insidious evil that meshed my soul.

I strove to push that ancient, haunting memory from my mind, to think only of the beauty of Valyne Kirk. And her smiling image was clear in my mind, as I went up the hill toward the old stone house. But she came to me before I had passed the last turning.

I heard her voice from among the trees, on a dim wood road that ran a short way up the somber, forested slope of Blue Squaw Mountain.

"Help——"

She must have recognized me when I paused; for her voice came again, gasping and breathless, but with an eager joy crowding upon its fear.

"Clay!"

For my name is Claiborne Coe, and she has always called me that.

"Clay, is it really you? Oh, help me——"

Through the twilight under the trees, I saw the gigantic shape lumbering after her. I ran to meet a great, bearded hulk of a man. His faded overalls were dark with dried blood. His broad face, dark above the rusty beard, was twitching with lust. His eyes were bulging and glazed.

Valyne was at my side, panting:

"Oh, Clay, stop him——"

I called to him, "Stop!"

He mouthed some bestial sound, and came on, ignoring me. His great hands were twitching, as if already shredding the clothing from Valyne's lovely body.

I stood before him. He swung at me

carelessly, with one great hairy arm, as if to brush me out of the way. I ducked under his arm, and slapped his bearded face.

"Stop it, man," I said sharply. "You don't know what you're doing!"

For the first time, then, his glassy, protruding eyes seemed to focus on me. In the hoarse, cursing rasp of his voice I read the words:

"My gal. . . . Git out of the way! . . ."

His great arm swung at me again. I didn't move, and the open-handed blow jarred me to my feet.

I heard Valyne's quick voice, low and distressed:

"Clay! Don't let him hurt you. He's a beast! I was coming down to meet you, when I saw him on the road. I hid. But he must have seen me. He found me, chased me——"

Muttering in the tawny beard, the man came at me, now in earnest, with his hairy fists balled.

I fought him, then.

Always, since I was a child, I have sought to avoid physical combat. The reason is more terrible than cowardice; for a red demon seizes my body, with the first blow I strike. Blind destroying fury overwhelms all restraint. And afterward, when the calm of sanity returns, a crimson fog dulls the memory of the fearful things I may have done.

It is as if some malevolent fiend wakes in me, to fight. . . .

A .45 automatic was slung under my armpit, but that mad demon had neither knowledge nor need of the weapon. I was conscious of an unseeing, savage fury that flung me at the giant. Then scarlet chaos ruled my brain. . . .

When it ebbed away, Valyne was pulling at my shoulder with frantic hands.

"Come, Clay!" her urgent voice was pleading. "You've done enough to him. Too much——"

Her voice released the cold shock of sanity.

The bearded man was lying in the muddy road, gasping hoarsely for breath. Fresh blood, now, was mingled with the dry on his overalls. His lips were crushed to a crimson pulp, and two of his front teeth were gone.

A FAINT sickness came into me, to see what I had done. Once in Singapore two Macanese attacked me in a dark alley, with knives, and when my mind had cleared of its scarlet madness, their heads had been almost severed with their own weapons. Since then I have walked in dread of that indwelling fiend. . . .

But the bearded man was able to stand up, when I aided him. His bulging eyes stared at me, and then at Valyne, without any expression that I could read. He cleared his throat, and spat a scarlet stream of teeth and blood. He pulled out a big, nickel-plated watch, that ticked like a clock, and looked at it sullenly. Then, without a word, he went down the road toward the village, reeling like a drunken man.

I wished that he had cursed or blustered. There is deadly menace in the silence of a beaten man. His glassy, inscrutable eyes had given no hint of what hellish thoughts might be passing through his twisted, brutish brain.

Valyne called for my handkerchief, and bound it around my bleeding knuckles.

"I'm sorry," I told her. "I'm not myself, when I fight. I might have killed him——"

She looked after the staggering figure, and her violet eyes were dark with dread.

"I'm glad—glad you beat him," she said, in a small, shuddery voice. "It was terrible to watch. But I've been so afraid! He's so strange, so dreadful! Perhaps now he'll let me alone.

"He's Jud Geer," she added, "the butcher."

I remembered Jud Geer, the butcher's son. He had been a queer, slow-witted bully. We smaller boys had dreaded him. It had been his perverted delight to torture us with gruesome objects from his father's shop, as when he bound and gagged little Tommy Lanning with the entrails of swine, and left him lying all night in a pool of blood and offal, where the rats came. . . .

When Valyne had done with the bandage, I grasped her small hands. She smiled at me. A queer, sharp little pain came into my throat, for her beauty was more exquisite than all my memories and dreams. I yearned to brush the haunting shadow from her pale face, to keep this strong lamp of joy burning for ever in her violet eyes.

"He doesn't matter," I told her, "Valyne darling."

It was sheer delight to be calling her that again, after seven grim and bitter years.

"He doesn't matter, for we shall soon be gone." I caught her precious warmth close to my heart. "Let's go—now!" I urged her, on a sudden impulse. "We can hire a car in the village, to take us down to the railroad."

"Clay——" she began, and hesitated doubtfully.

"I'm afraid of Creston," I told her. "I don't know why. But I've always dreaded returning—as much as I love you, Valyne! Every minute here is a torture to me. Let's go—today—right now!"

I could find no words for the singular dread that was seeping into me from the town's somber antiquity, from the forbidding gloom of these immemorial forested hills. I yearned to shake off the squalid poverty of Creston, its desolate, haunting decrepitude. I hungered for the lights and the bustle and the laughter of a city that was alive.

But my feeling was more than that. It was horror of the brooding evil that lurked like an invisible spider in this vale of desolation. And Valyne shared my dread. Her hand grew tight on mine.

"I'm glad you've come, Clay!" she whispered tremulously. "I'll be so glad to get away. You can't realize what it has been to wait, these last few months, in Doctor Kyle's house! The terror——"

With a little frightened gasp, she checked the words.

"But we can't go tonight, Clay. The doctor and his wife will want to see you, after all these years——"

"We must," I said. "Doctor Kyle doesn't want us to marry, Valyne——"

Her face had grown paler, and her violet eyes looked down at the road.

"I know," she whispered. "I know! And I have promised him that I won't marry you, until you have come and talked with him."

"If we must," I yielded. "But there can't be any sane reason, Valyne—I know it!"

Hand in hand, we walked slowly up the steep, rutted road, toward the old stone house; slowly, for we were laying bright plans. I told her again of the small fortune I had brought back from the Orient, of the good position now promised me with an importing firm. We were planning our escape, for ever, from Creston's brooding horror. Slowly, too, because we were both heavy with unspoken forebodings.

But at last the gray bulk of the old stone house loomed up before us in the dying twilight. Pale yellow lights winked malevolently at us from the narrow, squinting slits of windows. Valyne opened the heavy, iron-studded oaken door, and we entered.

How often have I wished that we had

slammed that accursed door, and fled into the haunted night!

2. "Fear Is Calling for You, Clay!"

THE stone house was old. It had been old when I was a child; but now it had changed. Now it seemed to me that nameless evil had sprung, since I had gone, from festering roots sunk deep into its grim antiquity. For the age of it then had been mellow, aloof, austere, even kindly; now it was a leering, gibbering horror. It was as if the house had died since my departure, and was now a restless specter, haunting its own hollow corpse.

Sarah Kyle met us in the hall, standing motionless under vast, grimy roof-beams two centuries old. Seven years had changed her. Her teeth were gone. Her face was narrowed, sharpened, shriveled. Her eyes were sunken, curiously bright. She was stooped, until her posture suggested some queer, bright-eyed bird.

She took my hand in her horny claw, and welcomed me with a cackling laugh. Then she began to make apologies for the poverty of her house, and to hint transparently for news of my business in the Orient.

"May I see the doctor?" I said.

Her bird-like eyes fixed me, with their uncanny glitter.

"You had better see him, Clay, if you have come to marry Valyne," her cracked voice shrilled. "And ye had better take his warning. Don't walk too near the edge of hell!"

I stepped back, startled, demanding:

"Mother Kyle! What do you mean?"

"Latham will tell you," she said, "if your own strange blood hasn't written it on your soul!"

"Where's the doctor?"

Her white head jerked sharply.

"Latham's still at work," she told me, "in his study in the attic. He's busy on his great book."

"His book?" I said, wondering.

"He is writing a history of the demonolatries of Creston."

"I want to talk to him right away."

"You can see him after supper." Her thin nose jerked at me emphatically, like the beak of a bird. "He'll give you reason enough why you can't marry Valyne, and drag her soul to hell!"

Valyne rescued me from her cackling strangeness, and led me up to my old room.

There I met the two servants of the house. They, Eben Hand and his wife Josepha, were setting up my bedstead.

Eben Hand was a fat, panting man. There was no color in his blond hair, his vague pale eyes, or his pasty skin. Mute, he expressed himself very swiftly to his wife with white, pliable fat hands.

She was a big, dark woman. Her eyes were wide and sharp and black. Her raven hair was coiled into glistening, oily ropes. Her upper lip bore a thick, dark fuzz. She was doing the most of the work, issuing commands to her silent husband in a coarse, mannish voice.

She bowed to me, oddly, as I entered with Valyne and set down my light bag. Her dark avid eyes remained fastened on my face, while she told her husband:

"Eben, this is Clay. Ye remember little Claiborne Coe, Eben, that used to run through the village. Well, this is him, come back to take our Valyne away. Clay got rich, Eben, in them furrin parts!"

At that last sentence, Eben Hand's small, pale eyes shifted suddenly from his wife to me. They searched my person, and seized upon my modest gold ring. His white fingers made some swift, covert reply.

When they had gone, I said to Valyne:

"I don't like them—or this house! Can't we stay somewhere else, tonight?"

"There's no hotel in Creston," she told me. "And it would look strange if we went away tonight. Besides, you must stay to talk with Doctor Kyle. I promised him."

But even the electric warmth of her kiss couldn't thaw out the chill of my forebodings.

DOCTOR KYLE came down at last from his attic room.

He was a big man. Although his body and his limbs remained massively powerful, his head had become curiously fleshless. His yellow cheeks were hollow, his dark flaming eyes were very deeply sunken. His head had become almost completely bald, so that it gave the disconcerting impression of a yellowed skull.

We met at the foot of the stairs. His hand was very cold, as if he had been working too long without a fire in his attic study.

No smile broke the solemn preoccupation of his cadaverous face.

"You are welcome to your old home, Clay," said his deep, hollow voice. "I'm very glad to see you, but"—his shrunken face changed curiously—"I had hoped that you would heed the warning of my letter, and never come for Valyne."

"I have come for her," I told him bluntly. "And I'm going to take her away, in spite of anything you tell me."

His gaunt head shook.

"Clay," he said, "you were always queer and reckless. But I know that you aren't reckless, madly selfish, enough to drag Valyne away to a living hell! Not after you have heard; for there must be one drop of human blood left in your veins!"

"Of course I wouldn't hurt Valyne," I told him. "Go ahead and tell me; I've had enough vague hints."

But Josepha Hand was setting supper on the table, and Valyne came toward us at the foot of the stair.

"Doctor," she said, smiling, "you've worked too late again! You know you shouldn't——"

Her light voice was swept away by his hissing whisper:

"Later, Clay. But it is a crime that God forbids!"

Valyne caught his arm, and mine, and drew us toward the table.

Sitting beside Valyne, so that sometimes my arm touched the firm warmth of hers, I wondered vainly what he could have to say. What demoniac purpose sought to bar me from her? What eldritch madness lurked in this ancient house?

As we ate, the man Eben Hand appeared suddenly in a doorway. He looked disturbed, his white hands fluttered agitatedly at his wife. And she called in a tone of startled dread:

"Doctor! You must go, Doctor! He can't get it quiet!"

Doctor Kyle's yellow, tight-skinned face grew a little paler. He rose hastily and followed Eben Hand through the doorway which, I remembered, led to the cellar stair.

Silently, the doctor's toothless, wrinkled wife watched the door with her too-bright eyes. She listened. Presently we heard a sound from below. It was a low scream—of tortured, animal agony.

When she heard it, Sarah Kyle relaxed as if with relief. Her bright eyes came back to the table; her brown, claw-like hands buttered a piece of bread. Her thin voice asked me:

"Clay, what business was ye in, in China?"

"One and another," I told her, absently. "The last was copper and tin, in the province of Szechwan."

I was looking at Valyne.

Her violet eyes were on her plate; her face was very pale. She was trembling;

her even teeth were sunk deep into her full red lip.

"Valyne!" I whispered. "What is it, darling?"

She merely shook her head a little. She didn't speak or lift her eyes.

"Copper and tin?" Sarah Kyle's cracked voice was repeating. "And ye found it profitable?"

Doctor Kyle silently resumed his place.

His wife asked some inaudible question, and I caught his whispered reply:

"It's restless—hungry, perhaps. Jud is late, today."

His dark, brilliant eyes looked across at me.

"I must beg your pardon for this mystery, Clay. Please finish your supper. Later you will understand." Then he asked, as if to launch a conversation, "Have you any collection of Chinese art?"

"No," I said jerkily. "Yes, a few pieces of good jade."

I had too much else to think about.

BEFORE the meal was done, there was a rapping at the back door. Answer-it, Josepha Hand called:

"Doctor, it's Jud."

His haggard face was relieved.

"Let him in," he called. "Let him take it down to Eben."

The man Jud Geer passed across the end of the room, carrying a milk can. There was more fresh blood on his overalls. A stained bandage was wrapped around his head, to cover his lips where my fist had pulped them.

His glassy, bulging eyes rolled toward me. They rested for a moment upon Valyne's still-bowed head, and I caught a lewd glitter in them.

He went out toward the cellar. The doctor and his wife listened anxiously. I heard an eager, bestial whining, and the sound of thickly splashing liquid.

Jud Geer came back into the room. He stopped by Doctor Kyle's chair, so close to me that I could hear the tick of his cheap watch. He held out his great, reddened hand, and muttered something through his bandage. But his filmed eyes were looking not at the doctor, but at Valyne.

Doctor Kyle dropped some coins into his palm, and he put them into his pocket, without taking his eyes off the girl.

Josepha Hand had opened the back door. At her impatient word, the gigantic butcher abruptly jerked his eyes away. He picked up his milk can, and went out.

It was after he had gone that I looked at the floor where the can had rested. On the bare pine boards was a circle of dark red. I knew that its contents had been blood.

Before I had time to digest that disturbing discovery, Eben Hand appeared again. His puffy face was strained and ashen; his colorless lips were twitching; his fat fingers nervously spelled out some hasty message.

"What is it?" Doctor Kyle's hollow voice was apprehensive.

"He says it won't touch it," said Josepha Hand. "It won't taste it. And he can't get it quiet. It keeps whimpering. He thinks it knows *he's* in the house. He thinks it's calling for *him*."

With that last word, her dark head jerked at me.

Doctor Kyle's deep-sunk, flaming eyes came wonderingly to my face.

"It couldn't remember," he whispered faintly, as if to himself. "It couldn't know Clay, after all these years."

Again, from the cellar, I heard that eager, feral whining.

"It does," whispered Josepha Hand. "It wants *him!*"

And I perceived suddenly that all eyes were fixed upon me, glazed and distended with horror, as if I had been some ghastly apparition. In that abrupt and

fearful silence, Valyne's fork rattled shockingly on the floor.

3. *"Your Father Was—Horror!"*

WHEN the meal was finished, Doctor Kyle took me apart to the end of the room, and lowered his hollow voice.

"Clay," he said solemnly, "I beg you to trust me, as if I were your true father. I want you to leave Valyne—to go away, without making me tell you the secret of your life."

"Why?" I demanded, bluntly impatient.

"I love you, Clay." His voice quivered faintly with emotion. "I love you as my own son, in spite of what I must tell you. That is why I have never told you, and why I am unwilling to tell you now.

"If you go away from Creston, Clay, you may find some happiness. I beg you to go, and to heed my warning—never marry!"

I seized his arm. Despite his age, it felt hard and powerful as Jud Geer's.

"I'm not going," I told him flatly. "Life without Valyne wouldn't be life. And why shouldn't I marry? I'm healthy, without any stain that I know of."

He bowed his yellow, cadaverous head, resignedly.

"I see that I must tell you. It is better for my words to wreck your life, than to let you and Valyne plunge unwarned into the horror waiting——"

His voice stopped suddenly; his dark eyes flew toward the cellar door.

From below I heard a hoarse scream, thick, maddened; the clanking of a heavy chain; the shriek of rusty nails being drawn; the crashing of splintered planking.

The doctor stood voiceless, ashen, trembling, until Eben Hand burst again into the room, mouthing incoherent sounds, fingers flying.

"It's breaking out!" cried Josepha Hand. "It's coming to *him!*"

Her dark eyes darted to me again, terrible with an undisguised and savage odium.

Abruptly recovering himself, Doctor Kyle picked up a heavy chair and ran through the cellar door. His wife scurried after him, with her astonishing bird-like agility.

"Let me, Latham!" her thin voice shrilled. "Let me! It always heeded me."

The two servants followed them apprehensively.

Valyne was standing at the other end of the room, staring after them with stunned tragedy in her shadowed violet eyes. I walked to her hastily, and grasped her cold hands.

"Valyne," I said urgently, "you tell me! What have they in the cellar? What makes this house so strange? Why does the doctor want us not to marry?"

Her eyes, looking back at me, were dark and wide with dread. Her cold hands trembled.

"You're afraid, darling!" I cried. "Tell me—what do you fear?"

But a terrible intuition had already given me the answer.

"You're afraid of me!"

She looked at me in mute agony, without denial.

"I know only what he told me, Clay."

Her voice broke, and her eyes gleamed with tears. Her warm arms were suddenly around me, clinging with the pressure of urgent need.

"Remember I love you, Clay!" she sobbed. "Whatever you may be, remember that I love you."

SHE was still in my arms when Doctor Kyle came back up the stairs, walking with a hasty, shaken step. His voice quick and nervous, he called:

"Clay, will you please come with me

for a moment? And hurry! I think our lives are all in danger, if you don't."

Doubtfully, I said, "But why?"

"You'll understand when we have talked," he said, "but now there's no time. Come!"

I drew away from Valyne, and followed him. Unobtrusively, I loosened the .45 under my coat. I found no need of the weapon, however—then.

The great cellar of my memory had been cut in half with a heavy wall of new masonry. There was a massive connecting door, studded with iron bolts, pierced with a small opening thickly barred.

Eben Hand and his wife were waiting at the foot of the steps, beside Sarah Kyle. Hand's fingers were moving rapidly, as his wife watched them in the light of a kerosene lamp on a rough deal table. On the floor was another red circle, where the can of blood had rested.

The three were silent as I came down the steps. They retreated from me, as if I had been somehow—dreadful.

Doctor Kyle led me to the grating, and I became aware of a peculiar odor from beyond. It was an animal scent, powerful, acrid, unpleasant, yet certainly the scent of no animal I knew.

Through the bars came a whining, low, eager, bestial.

"Speak to it," Doctor Kyle told me, swiftly. "Doesn't matter what you say. Just use a firm, friendly tone——"

As I hesitated, some fiend of fortuity thrust into my mind Poe's macabre lines:

> They are neither man nor woman—
> They are neither brute nor human—
> They are Ghouls.

As I spoke it, a stronger wave of that feral effluvium came through the grating. It rocked me with nausea. I heard the clatter of a chain, the shuffling of some great, clumsy body.

And stark horror peered through the bars, with eyes like twin scarlet pits of flaming hell. Its half-glimpsed face was monstrous, swollen, livid, queerly hairy, without a nose. It was the face of nothing sane or right or normal.

One fearful glimpse brought home the fearful aptness of my quotation. Then I heard a massive body drop in jangling chains upon the floor beyond. There was a low, singular sound, not unlike the contented purr of a gigantic cat. Then the sound of lapping. . . .

When I looked at the others, in the lamp's yellow glow, their apprehensive tension was gone, although they still looked askance at me.

"It's satisfied," said Josepha Hand, looking at her husband's fleeting white fingers. "Now it's willing to feed."

I swung upon my foster-father.

"Now," I pressed him, "you've got to tell me!"

His fleshless head jerked toward the steps.

"Come to my room." And when we were on the stairs, his hollow voice added: "Try to keep a grip on yourself, Clay, when you know. And pray to God that no other demon may ever be born into this accursed house!"

THE bare and ancient rafters were low upon his locked attic room. It was cold, and his two lamps could not dispel its sinister gloom. There were chairs, and an antique writing-desk. The shelves were heavy with dark and massive volumes in age-discolored bindings, whose titles, a glance told me, had all to do with the history of witchcraft, occultism, lycanthropy, demonology, and darker lore. A tall glass cabinet held crystal globes, grotesque little idols and figurines of wood and wax, parcels of dried herbs, and a few stained and rusted weapons.

"My study and museum," Doctor Kyle

boomed, as I shivered from the musty chill. "Here I have carried on my research into the evil practises that have festered in the hills of Creston. Knowing these people, I have gained access to precious material. Clay, even now there are hideous forbidden rites of demon-worship being——"

"Doctor," I broke in, "if you really have anything to say, say it."

"Sit down, Clay," he said.

But I was too much concerned to sit. I stood behind a chair, gripping the back of it with my hands. Doctor Kyle paced up and down before me, two or three times, running his lank fingers nervously across his bare yellow scalp, as if to flatten invisible hair.

"I suppose you don't remember your mother, Clay?" he asked at length, as if seeking an easy way into a difficult subject.

"No," I told him. "She died, and you brought me here, before I was two years old."

"We told you that she died," his voice rumbled, suddenly hoarse and low. "And you never knew of your twin?"

"You told me I was the last one of my family."

His flaming eyes stared at me, and his voice pealed solemnly:

"Your mother died only a few months ago, Clay. And your twin brother is still living."

Questions thronged my mind. But the stinging dust of horror had suddenly filled my throat. I could only listen, as that hollow voice went on, like a booming chant of doom.

"I shall begin, Clay, with the early history of your family." His lean hand gestured at the dark, heavy volumes on the shelves. "I have here the library of your grandfather, Eliakim Coe. From his private papers I have learned a great deal of the secret history of Creston—and of your people.

"The first Coe in America came with a cloud upon his name—the Church had almost obtained his conviction on charges of demonolatry. The Henry Coe who founded Creston was a fugitive from the witchcraft trials of Salem, and in this inaccessible wilderness he carried on the evil worship that had roused the Puritan ire.

"These dark forests have hidden fearful things, Clay! It may shock you to learn that for four hundred years every generation of your family has dealt in every manner of Satanism, black magic, and demon-worship.

"Your grandfather, Eliakim Coe, was the last and the most powerful of a line of wizards. But he paid a fearful price for his power. He paid his daughter, Elizabeth, who was your mother."

"My mother!" I was bewildered and shocked.

"Your true father, Clay," continued that ringing, hypnotic chant, "was not the distant cousin, Esmond Coe, who married your mother over your grandfather's protests, and was found stabbed to death beside her on the morning of the bridal night. No! That crime was but the beginning of a frightful ceremony. And Eliakim Coe took his daughter, on the night following, to a circle of stones about an ancient altar on the summit of the mountain——"

"Once," the shuddering whisper was wrung from me, "I saw that altar!"

"And there," that dread, compelling voice throbbed on, "that diabolical ceremony was carried to its blasphemous completion. Stripped and bound, the virginal body of your mother was laid across the blackened altar. In response to the esoteric forbidden rituals of the wizard, a Dark Power came to claim the offering.

"And Eliakim Coe brought his daughter back, crippled and maddened, to give birth to you, Clay—and to your twin!"

"What"—I forced out the faint whisper—"what do you mean?"

Doctor Latham Kyle snapped his jaws together. His yellow lips were tight and hard as a mummy's. His deep eyes flamed at me. The boom of his hollow voice was startling.

"Clay," he said, "there are forces, powers, entities, that science has never glimpsed—because they are too colossal. But you must sense the tremendous shadows that fall upon our tiny earth from the frigid voids of space. Clay, you must know the fearful rulers of the fourth dimension! Your own dark blood must whisper to you——"

I had to nod, in spite of the outraged protest clamoring in my brain. For in the mystic Orient, as well as in my strange childhood, I had seen things that science and sanity could not account for.

"Then——"

The dry, husky whisper crept like an odious reptile past my lips.

"Then—my father was not a man? And I'm not entirely—human?"

The yellow skull nodded solemnly; the hollow voice intoned:

"That is the hideous truth, Clay, that I have feared to tell you."

Panic was rushing through my heart, like a black and frozen wind.

"So that's why," I breathed, "I've always felt—different! That's why I've always been a stranger among men! It's that evil blood that seizes my body when I fight, like a destroying demon——"

"Yes," the low, booming voice caught the word. "The demon in you." The flaming eyes lifted. "Through some accident of inheritance, the dark blood is recessive in you, Clay. Physically, you appear quite human. Psychically, you are also, save for the shadow of strangeness that you feel, and for the waking of the demon when you fight.

"But I'm afraid for you, Clay!"

The terrible voice sank lower.

"Passion will awake that slumbering demon. It will transmute that shadow into reality. You must walk with care, my son, or you will lose all humanity, in a hideous reversion to the dark blood!

"If you married, you might become as monstrous as your brother. The strange blood was dominant in him. Tonight, in wishing to see you, he—or it—was displaying a fit of human emotion as rare as your fits of evil. For the most part, your twin is a mad monstrosity——"

"TONIGHT!"

My mounting terror seized the word, and I reeled under an avalanche of dread. Icy sweat drenched me. Sick, quivering, I sank against the back of the chair. It was a little time before my lips could form the faint query:

"Tonight? The thing in the cellar—that wanted me? That is my—my *brother?*"

Doctor Kyle nodded. His dark eyes looked quickly away, as if with pity. His voice throbbed to me faintly through the gray mist of dread:

"Your own brother, Clay. Its blood is your blood. Passion will cause your reversion to its form. What is equally dreadful, if you should marry Valyne, or any other woman, your children would probably be such things as it is!"

The chill gloom of the musty attic chamber was spinning around me. Fainter, ever receding, still I heard the booming tones:

"I attended your mother when you and your twin were born. I wanted to destroy the other, but neither she nor her father would allow. There was a strange perversity in her love. And Eliakim Coe desired the monster in the practise of

the dark art that was overwhelming him.

"As the strange being grew, your mother saw that it could never be reared in the world of men. When you were two years old—when Eliakim Coe died, a victim of the fearful powers he had summoned out of space—she left you in this household, and took the other into the forest.

"Clay, it was a dreadful, secret life that your mother led, for the next twenty years and more, in these dark mountains above Creston! She sacrificed herself for her monstrous son. She kept it in a cave, on Blue Squaw Mountain.

"She had no contact with the world, save for her infrequent midnight visits to me. But many a time, Clay, until the year when you left Creston, she stood beside your bed at night, and even touched your hair. But always she went back.

"A few months ago she came to me, ill. I told her that she was going to die. On the last night of her life, she coaxed your strange brother down from the cave, and gave it into my keeping. Since then we have kept it in the cellar.

"I still feel that it should be destroyed —as I wanted to destroy it when it was born. But I have preserved its life because of my promise to your mother, and because it will be a living exhibit to prove the authenticity of my book: *A History of the Sorceries and Demonolatries of Creston.*"

Fast in a frozen sea of dread, I dimly knew that Doctor Kyle was turning toward the door. I could scarcely hear him say:

"You may go back to your room, Clay. You see why you can never marry Valyne."

4. *At the Mercy of—Monstrosity!*

BACK in my own frosty room, I collapsed on the bed. I tried to think. But red chaos ruled my brain. Only one clear thought emerged: If I couldn't marry Valyne Kirk, then I must die.

I tried to doubt what Doctor Kyle had told me. It was hideously incredible, and belief in it meant death. But the sober, convincing manner of his telling, the strangeness that had shadowed all my life, the lurking dread that festered in Creston, the hideous monster in the cellar—these combined to bring me maddening conviction.

I tried to think it a lie. But what reason had Doctor Kyle to lie to me, to whom he had always been a second father? What motive could he have for a deception calculated only to drive me away from Creston, a crazed and hopeless fugitive, for ever? And what lie could have darkened all my life, and set me apart from men, even in the distant East?

No! I could not escape the clutching intuition of horror. Strange and fearful blood burned through my body. In all the world was no being of my own kind —none save that chained monstrosity! And my love for Valyne could give birth only to terror, madness, and death.

Distantly, from below, I heard a sound like howling, and a chain clanking, and wood splintering. The monster—my twin——

Cold, trembling, I sat up on the edge of the bed. It was struggling; perhaps it would escape. A terrible resolve steadied me. I would never see it again.

I strode grimly to the window. Outside was night; the silent, immemorial forests of Creston; the gloomy, tangled slope of Blue Squaw Mountain, whose summit was crowned with that altar of frightful sacrifice.

Shrinking from the darkness and the horror of it, I was suddenly conscious of the weight sagging against my chest. There was a surer way. . . .

With a hand now steady, I slipped

the automatic out of its holster. It was heavy and cold and black. Its grim steel efficiency was a match for all the festering evil of ancient Creston. I snapped back the slide and watched the bright, blunt cartridge leap into the chamber.

I thrust the hard muzzle resolutely against my temple, hardly conscious of the quiet, swift rapping upon my door. But it was flung open, and Valyne rushed to me. Her urgent hand jerked my arm away.

"Clay! Clay!" gasped her terrified whisper. "I came because I was afraid you would!"

She stood before me. Her trembling hand still held down the gun. Her breast was fluttering to her quick breathing. Her violet eyes, wide, glistening with tears, held my face. The live, pulsating beauty of her slim body stung my own eyes with tears. Every soft line of it was infinitely precious. My resolution found new steel.

"Why shouldn't I?" I rasped the hoarse demand. "You know what I am! You know why we can't marry! And that the sooner I die the less likely I am to revert to—to something hideous!"

"I know what Doctor Kyle says." Her eyes probed to the back of my brain. "And you believe it, Clay?"

"I—I do. I tried not to. But my whole life points to the truth of it—even to the rage that struck down Jud Geer!

"You must go away, Valyne," I said. I pushed her toward the door. "You must let me kill that fiend in me before it injures you."

Her body stood tremulously firm against the pressure of my hands.

"You don't understand, Clay," she told me, and a ringing strength was in her voice. "Even if it's true, I can't let you die—alone! For I love you, Clay."

I returned the gun to its holster, and caught her hands in mine. For I had been touched and elated by the sudden conviction that our love was a pure flame that could burn all the tainting horror from my blood.

Her warm hands clasped mine, and she whispered:

"Clay, promise me that you will live as long as I do! Promise me that you will never again surrender to that horror! Just promise. And we will go away from Creston, in the morning, as we planned. Perhaps we can find a way to happiness. At least we can be together for a while—and together when we die!"

I promised. I thought we might consult some psychiatrist or occultist. . . .

The glory of her love seemed for a little time to banish the sinister chill of evil from the room. I begged her to stay with me; for the dread that still haunted me was stronger than my regard for convention. And perhaps she would have stayed; for she too was strained and white with unuttered forebodings.

But there was a light, hurried knocking on the door, and old Sarah Kyle hobbled into the room. Her dark, pointed face was bloodless. Her small, bright eyes darted about the room, and a thin, anxious whisper lisped from her toothless mouth:

"Have ye seen it, Clay? Have ye heard it?"

"You mean——" I wet my lips. "You mean the thing in the cellar?"

Her glittering eyes met mine, veiled with unspeakable dread.

"Your brother," shrilled her tremulous whisper, "has broken his chains and gone."

I swayed, and caught Valyne to me, as if an icy dark wind had sought to drag her away.

The cracked whisper insisted:

"Have ye heard it?"

"Half an hour ago I heard the chain

rattling, and the sound of breaking wood."

The thin lips came together, like strips of dried leather.

"That must have been when it escaped. God knows where it went!"

Valyne whispered, into the fearful silence:

"What will it do, Mother Kyle?" Her big violet eyes came to me, with a naked horror pleading in them. "One day," she whispered, "I went down into the cellar, and it saw me through the bars. It wanted me, Clay! It tried to break out. For days it howled, and wouldn't touch its food.

"I'm afraid, Clay."

Her tense, trembling arms slipped around my neck, and her frightened eyes went back to Sarah Kyle.

Her thin lips still were pursed.

"I don't know what it will do," her thin voice said slowly. "It is cunning, and aflame with demon lusts. You're in danger, Valyne. Go back to your room, and lock the door. The rest of us must try to find it. The doctor and the servants are searching, now.

"And you must be careful for yourself, Clay. It was friendly, a while ago—it knew its own blood. But if it learns that you love Valyne, its affection will turn to jealous rage. . . .

"Listen!"

The whispered warning fell suddenly, and for a moment we were silent in the frosty room.

"I thought I heard it," said Sarah Kyle. "We must hasten. You must keep with me, Clay. The doctor thinks it will come to you."

In a shivering voice, Valyne said:

"Let me go with you."

"No, darling," protested the old woman; "you must keep out of its sight. Remember, once it went mad at sight of you. If it saw you again, we could never quiet it. And it might harm you."

Valyne acquiesced, and we took her to her room. She kissed me, and her lips were cold.

"Remember your promise, Clay," she whispered. "And tomorrow we shall go away together. Don't let it harm you!"

We heard the lock snap in her door, and went down the stairs.

Sarah Kyle took a kerosene lamp from the dining-table.

"We shall go to the cellar to begin." Her bright, sunken eyes darted at me suddenly. "Have ye any sense for it, Clay? Any intuition from the common blood? Do ye think that ye could trail it?"

"I don't know."

My dazed brain was still spinning blindly along the black, swift river of horror.

"The doctor says it will come to you," she was saying. "And when it comes, I can calm it. It ever heeded me——"

"It won't come to nobody," put in the flat, mannish voice of big Joseph Hand, who had just appeared out of the dark hall. "It wants that girl! It smelled the odor of her on *him,* when he came to speak to it. It broke out to git her, and it won't come to nobody——"

SARAH KYLE led the way down the steps, and I carried the lamp into the walled-off cell. The heavy door had been crushed outward, torn from its hinges as if by some terrific projectile. A broken length of rusty iron chain lay across the threshold. Beyond was a rude wooden trough, which had been overturned, to spill dark, clotted blood across the foul stone floor.

Suffocatingly strong in the room was that acrid, animal stench. Reeling with its nausea, I stumbled back toward the door. But an idea had struck me. The others had seemed unaware of the odor; perhaps I had an abnormal sensitivity to it. If I could follow the trail——

Faintly, then, I heard Valyne's scream.

I ran up the two flights of stairs to her room, vainly cursing the blind folly that had left her alone. Sarah Kyle came clattering along behind, carrying the lamp.

"Valyne!" I gasped, at the door. "Valyne, are you all right?"

The answer was the bang of a loose shutter.

The door was still locked. I kicked it twice, thrust my arm through the hole to twist the key that she had left in the lock. The yellow flicker of Sarah Kyle's lamp showed that the room was empty. The bed was turned down; a filmy pink nightdress was laid across the pillow.

The window was open; the unfastened shutter banged again.

Ashen-faced, Sarah Kyle was staring out into the frosty dark.

"It was outside," she whispered. "It climbed over the tool shed, and broke through the window. It has carried the poor darling out into the forest."

Her voice became a thin, fervid scream.

"I wish to God my husband had killed that fiend when it was born!"

"Where"—the wild whisper leapt from my lips—"where are the others?"

I heard her say, "Searching——"

Then my frantic voice was ringing through the gloomy halls:

"Doctor Kyle! It has taken Valyne!"

Ghastly echoes gibbered at me.

"Where could they all be?"

"Searching," said Sarah Kyle. "They must be outside."

"God! I can't stand here wasting time! Where could it have taken her?"

The stooped old hag came suddenly toward me and thrust the sputtering lamp into my face. The skeletal fingers of one claw-like hand sank savagely into my arm. Her piercing eyes transfixed me. Her high voice sank to a strained and husky whisper.

"Don't ye know, Clay? Doesn't your own sleeping demon whisper it to your own stained soul? Won't your own dark blood draw ye there?"

Instinctively jerking back, I demanded: "What do you mean?"

Her fingers clung to my arm with a terrible strength, and her voice rasped on with its unthinkable accusation:

"Have ye never felt the call of the elder dark beings that are your kin, Clay? Are ye never drawn to the black altar on the mountain, where your evil father came to your mother? Have ye no sense of the secret power of that circle of stones——"

"You mean"—the gasp broke from my lips—"you mean it has taken her—there?"

Her shriveled head jerked to a quick, sinister nod.

"It knows the place," she said, "for your mother often took it there. She told me it was ever most content in the occult power of that mystic circle. It must have taken Valyne there. And may she die before the demon-child is born!"

5. *The Beast in the Beast*

I THINK that Sarah Kyle tried to follow me up Blue Squaw Mountain. But desperation had lent me frantic wings. Her shrill voice fell behind, screaming:

"Wait for me, Clay! I can calm it! It always understood——"

The night was moonless and frosty and still. It was very dark beneath the gnarled and ancient trees, upon that rugged mountain slope. And it was many years since I had trod it. Again and again I sprawled and fell in the thorny tangles of undergrowth, or blundered heavily into the boles of gigantic trees. And once I rose, fingering my lacerated, bleeding face, to realize that I was lost. But grim urgency brought back youthful memories with the effect of preternatural vision. And obscure instincts brought me at last, breath-

less and fearful, to the leafy edge of that forbidden glade that since childhood I had apprehensively shunned.

There horror struck me motionless.

Red tongues of malevolent flame set lurid shadows into a fantastic demon dance against the surrounding dark wall of forest. Glowing sinister scarlet outlined the circle of rough-hewn monolithic stones, standing twice a man's height. Within that cabalistic circle I could see the low, blood-darkened altar—burdened with madness and terror!

Valyne Kirk lay across it, on her back, between two wan and ghastly fires. She was stripped nearly nude; her alabaster loveliness was bare to the red, mounting flames. Her wrists and ankles were bound with rope. She was motionless, and, I thought, unconscious.

Crouching over her, looming colossal and grotesque and hideous in the sinister gleam of the altar fires, was the monster I had glimpsed in the cellar dungeon—that dread creature of my own dark blood. It brought back those haunting lines from Poe:

> They are neither man nor woman—
> They are neither brute nor human—

It was gigantic, yet vaguely man-like in outline. It was horned. Its long, angular legs ended in cloven hoofs. Its body was heavy, bulging, hideously gross. It was covered with coarse, dark hair.

The stench of it came to me where I stood, an odor overwhelmingly nauseating as that of a reptile's den.

The red flames burst higher, on either side of Valyne's helpless body, and suddenly I saw its face. To my mind came that other line:

> They are Ghouls.

There are things that words cannot describe, even by suggestion. I can say that its face was grossly broad, and yet made savage with an angular gauntness; that it was noseless, queerly hairy, livid; that its eyes were crimson lakes of flaming hell.

But the demon that glared from it escapes the words.

It is enough to say that when I looked into that creature's face, and knew that its blood was mine—then I realized that my promise to Valyne had been mad folly. If the blood of that beast was in my veins, then it must be spilled before its pollution touched another human soul.

It was curiously just, I thought, that one fiend should destroy another. For once I was conscious of no shrinking from combat. I was frankly glad of the red and dreadful rage that swept me into the fury of destruction.

As I leapt past the circle of tall stones, I saw that the twin fires were burning close to Valyne. Their crimson tongues would soon be licking her naked flash—unless I won.

The monstrosity saw me. With an uncouth, bestial snarl of surprize and rage, it lumbered toward me. Its hairy, taloned, foul-smelling hand slapped at me. The blow flung me to the frosty ground, at the foot of the black altar.

I stumbled back to my feet, plunging blindly toward it. . . . The gun under my coat was forgotten. And all the details of the fight have been fogged with that red madness. I know that I fought that being, body to body. I know that I staggered with the sickness of its nauseating effluvium. I remember being crushed in its powerful, hairy arms, being flung to the ground and kicked with its cloven hooves. I dimly recall that it battered at my head, with a great black stone from the altar. . . .

But when the shock of returning sanity struck me, it was slumping to the ground. I reeled over it, swinging a last desperate blow. It went wild; I stumbled groggily to my knees.

The gross, hairy bulk lay before the black altar. It quivered a little, and ceased to move. The mad horror of its face was hidden, for which I was thankful. I saw a little dark hole in the side of its long, flattened head, saw dark blood gushing out. That surprized me, for it was a bullet wound, and I didn't remember having drawn my gun. But in that crimson chaos——

Valyne moaned. I lurched to the low black altar, and lifted her from between the two licking fires. I untied the ropes. She was shivering. Her violet eyes looked at me, and it sickened me to see their mute and shrinking terror.

"The thing" — she choked — "the thing——"

"It will never frighten you again," I promised, "Valyne darling."

I carried her a little away from the inert horror by the altar, and wrapped my coat around her. My arms clung to her. The last embrace. . . .

From the moment I glimpsed that hideous face, my purpose had been clear. Hope and doubt alike had died before the grim resolve that never should another such demon be born into the world. Not if my death could prevent it. . . .

I was glad when Valyne seemed to drop again into unconsciousness—from shock and fear, I was certain, rather than from any injury. It was better that she shouldn't see me go.

I left her, and reluctantly touched the gray, motionless bulk of the monster. Its limp weight and the rush of blood from the little wound assured me that it was truly dead.

Resolutely, then, I strode toward the dark wall of forest that would hide my body, fumbling under my coat for the automatic.

"Clay!"

The strong hollow voice boomed from beyond the circle of stones, and gaunt Doctor Kyle stalked into the crimson light. His powerful hand gripped a hunting-rifle. Gray smoke was curling from its muzzle. He stood for a moment between two red-lit pillars, and in the scarlet flickering his head looked more than ever like a skull.

He nodded to my voiceless question.

"Yes," he said, "I shot your brother, Clay—I should have killed him the day he was born. You were unarmed; he was getting the better of you. Sarah," he explained, "told us where you had come.—Valyne! is she all right?"

I turned for a moment to look at her motionless body. It wavered and faded with my tears, and my voice was husky when I said:

"She isn't harmed, Doctor. And you needn't fear that I shall wreck her life, or that there shall be born another of my blood. For I'm going—after my brother."

The sunken eyes that flamed from that gaunt, skeletal head were abruptly crimson in the firelight. Through thin lips came the ghastly rasp:

"Perhaps—perhaps that is best."

And I strode on, away from the twin red fires of the blood-stained altar, through the tall silent stones, toward the dark forest waiting to drink my blood. I was reaching again for the cold, comforting grip of the automatic. Its swift flame would burn all the horror and the madness from my brain. When I was dead, I thought with dim gratitude, I should be at last like other men. . . .

"Clay——"

It was Valyne's voice, faint, but urgent, frantic.

But I dared not stop, lest my love and her tenderness should sweep me into the black pit of a crime too hideous to name. I strode on, into the shadows that would hide and comfort me for ever.

"Clay!" It was a terrified gasp. "Come back to me. Remember your promise——"

But rasping against my brain was Doctor Kyle's fearful warning:

"Passion will wake your slumbering demon, Clay. You must walk with care, my son, or you will lose all humanity, in a hideous reversion. If you married, you might become as monstrous as your brother."

I heard his hollow tones addressing Valyne:

"Peace, my child. God has ordered it. I will care for you——"

I hastened on, lest my purpose fail too soon. . . .

The faint, desperate appeal came again:

"Clay—listen! It's all a trick. A ghastly hoax! *Listen!*"

A hoax! That word brought me back at a run. My outraged sanity had fought grimly against belief. But there had seemed no escape. What could have been the motive for so frightful a deception?

"My child!" Amazement boomed in the voice of Doctor Kyle. "What are you saying?"

"Listen!" repeated Valyne. "To that!"

She struggled to sit up, pointing at the dead monster. Wonderingly, I moved toward it, stooped. And abruptly, in the still, frosty air, I heard a familiar sound: the jangling tick of a cheap watch.

"It's Jud!" her faint voice said. "I heard his watch, when he was carrying me."

I flung back the hideous head, and tore at its ghastly face. It came away in my hands, a painted mask of wax and soft rubber adhesive. Beneath, dark with oozing blood, was the broad, bearded face of Jud Geer. The glazed, protruding eyes, still open, leered up with the fearful grin of death.

"Jud!" exclaimed the hollow, surprized voice of Doctor Kyle. "How could he——"

I ROSE abruptly to face him.

"You needn't act, Doctor," I told him, grimly. "This thing is your planning—though God knows what you hoped to gain by preventing my marriage to Valyne——"

"Clay!" he interrupted, still protesting. "Are you mad? Sarah and I have loved you since you were an infant. I was desolated at the thought of your suicide——"

"Suicide!" I grasped the word, with sudden understanding. "That's it! You were trying to drive me to kill myself. It's all part of a monstrous plot—everything from that letter you wrote me months ago, to Jud carrying Valyne up here. You were all trying to drive me to insane suicide! But, in Heaven's name, why?"

"I'll tell you, Clay." A hard ring came into his hollow voice. "We are poor in Creston. We live and die in bitter, grinding poverty. And we knew that you had made money in the Orient; that if you died, before your marriage, that money would be ours.

"The servants were ready to aid us, for a share. Jud Geer was useful, because he wanted Valyne. I shot him because I saw you were getting the better of him; I feared you were about to unmask him. Besides, he was becoming too impatient for his reward.

"My studies in the dark secret history of Creston supplied material for the hoax. Some of your forefathers really dealt in the black arts, Clay—some of them must actually have had a hand in the building of this altar.

"But out of respect for the dead"—and a twisted smile of terrible mockery crossed his gaunt, skeletal face—"I should tell you that your grandfather, Eliakim Coe, was no more than a common lunatic. He murdered your father in his bed, true enough. And he wrecked

your mother's life, if in a manner a little less picturesque than I told you.

"And your own youth, in the shadow of that crime, was strange enough to give some color to my account."

He smiled again in the red firelight, hideously.

"The details should be clear enough, if I mention Jud's private entrance to the cellar——"

The rifle lifted a little in his tense grasp.

"It was a fair plan, Clay." His voice rang grim and cold with triumphant menace. "And even now it shall not fail me!" His tone sank. "It is known that you and Jud were rivals for Valyne. It is known that you have fought, and that you both are violent men. I shall remove from Jud's body this artistic creation of mine, that made him your brother. And who will be surprized to find the three of you together, dead?"

Very abruptly, his rifle snapped to the level. Its barrel flamed red in the glare from the altar, with a companion light to the twin fires of hell in the sunken eyes. Sparks burst from the muzzle, and the report shattered against the pillars of stone.

For once, then, I was completely thankful for that swift, deadly response to danger that has ever been independent of my conscious mind. I was myself surprized to feel the hard abrupt recoil of the automatic in my hand.

And Doctor Kyle had never learned of the weapon in my armpit holster. I think I had fired before he saw the gun; I am sure that he was dead before his aimless contracting finger pulled the trigger of the falling rifle.

Valyne and I have never returned to Creston. In the darkness we went down the farther slope of Blue Squaw Mountain, and morning found us in a green and peaceful meadow, whose sunlit fragrance washed away the horror of the night.

Unsought Advice

By DOROTHY QUICK

Traffic not with ghosts
  Lest if you do
You find their world
  More real than earth to you.

The Salem Horror

By HENRY KUTTNER

A ghastly horror from the witchcraft days of three centuries ago reared its dreadful form in the Witch Room of that old house in Derby Street

WHEN Carson first noticed the sounds in his cellar, he ascribed them to the rats. Later he began to hear the tales which were whispered by the superstitious Polish mill workers in Derby Street regarding the first occupant of the ancient house, Abigail Prinn. There was none living today who could remember the diabolical old hag, but the morbid legends which thrive in the "witch district" of Salem like rank weeds on a neglected grave gave disturbing particulars of her activities, and were unpleasantly explicit regarding the detestable sacrifices she was known to have made to a worm-eater, crescent-horned image of dubious origin. The oldsters still muttered of Abbie Prinn and her monstrous boasts that she was high priestess of a fearfully potent god which dwelt deep in the hills. Indeed, it was the old witch's reckless boasting which had led to her abrupt and mysterious death in 1692, about the time of the famous hangings on Gallows Hill. No one liked to talk about it, but occasionally a toothless crone would mumble fearfully that the flames could not burn her, for her whole body had taken on the peculiar anesthesia of her witch-mark.

Abbie Prinn and her anomalous statue had long since vanished, but it was still difficult to find tenants for her decrepit, gabled house, with its overhanging second story and curious diamond-paned casement windows. The house's evil notoriety had spread throughout Salem. Nothing had actually happened there of recent years which might give rise to the inexplicable tales, but those who rented the house had a habit of moving out hastily, generally with vague and unsatisfactory explanations connected with the rats.

And it was a rat which led Carson to the Witch Room. The squealing and muffled pattering within the rotting walls had disturbed Carson more than once during the nights of his first week in the house, which he had rented to obtain the solitude that would enable him to complete a novel for which his publishers had been asking—another light romance to add to Carson's long string of popular successes. But it was not until some time later that he began to entertain certain wildly fantastic surmises regarding the intelligence of the rat that scurried from under his feet in the dark hallway one evening.

The house had been wired for electricity, but the bulb in the hall was small and gave a dim light. The rat was a misshapen, black shadow as it darted a few feet away and paused, apparently watching him.

At another time Carson might have dismissed the animal with a threatening gesture and returned to his work. But the traffic on Derby Street had been unusually noisy, and he had found it difficult to concentrate upon his novel. His nerves, for no apparent reason, were taut; and somehow it seemed that the rat, watching just beyond his reach, was eyeing him with sardonic amusement.

Smiling at the conceit, he took a few steps toward the rat, and it rushed away to the cellar door, which he saw with surprize was ajar. He must have neglected to close it the last time he had been in the cellar, although he generally took care to keep the doors shut, for the ancient house was drafty. The rat waited in the doorway.

Unreasonaby annoyed, Carson hurried forward, sending the rat scurrying down the stairway. He switched on the cellar light and observed the rat in a corner. It watched him keenly out of glittering little eyes.

As he descended the stairs he could not help feeling that he was acting like a fool. But his work had been tiring, and subconsciously he welcomed any interruption. He moved across the cellar to the rat, seeing with astonishment that the creature remained unmoving, staring at him. A strange feeling of uneasiness began to grow within him. The rat was acting ab-

"Abbie Prinn served strange gods, and God knows what she may do to fulfill her vengeance on Salem."

normally, he felt; and the unwinking gaze of its cold shoe-button eyes was somehow disturbing.

Then he laughed to himself, for the rat had suddenly whisked aside and disappeared into a little hole in the cellar wall. Idly he scratched a cross with his toe in the dirt before the burrow, deciding that he would set a trap there in the morning.

The rat's snout and ragged whiskers protruded cautiously. It moved forward and then hesitated, drew back. Then the animal began to act in a singular and unaccountable manner—almost as though it were dancing, Carson thought. It moved tentatively forward, retreated again. It would give a little dart forward and be brought up short, then leap back hastily, as though—the simile flashed into Carson's mind—a snake were coiled before the burrow, alert to prevent the rat's escape. But there was nothing there save the little cross Carson had scratched in the dust.

No doubt it was Carson himself who blocked the rat's escape, for he was standing within a few feet of the burrow. He moved forward, and the animal hurriedly retreated out of sight.

His interest piqued, Carson found a stick and poked it exploringly into the hole. As he did so his eye, close to the wall, detected something strange about the stone slab just above the rat burrow. A quick glance around its edge confirmed his suspicion. The slab was apparently movable.

Carson examined it closely, noticed a depression on its edge which would afford a handhold. His fingers fitted easily into the groove, and he pulled tentatively. The stone moved a trifle and stopped. He pulled harder, and with a sprinkling of dry earth the slab swung away from the wall as though on hinges.

A black rectangle, shoulder-high, gaped in the wall. From its depths a musty, unpleasant stench of dead air welled out, and involuntarily Carson retreated a step. Suddenly he remembered the monstrous tales of Abbie Prinn and the hideous secrets she was supposed to have kept hidden in her house. Had he stumbled upon some hidden retreat of the long-dead witch?

Before entering the dark gap he took the precaution of obtaining a flashlight from upstairs. Then he cautiously bent his head and stepped into the narrow, evil-smelling passage, sending the flashlight's beam probing out before him.

He was in a narrow tunnel, scarcely higher than his head, and walled and paved with stone slabs. It ran straight ahead for perhaps fifteen feet, and then broadened out into a roomy chamber. As Carson stepped into the underground room—no doubt a hidden retreat of Abbie Prinn's, a hiding-place, he thought, which nevertheless could not save her on the day the fright-crazed mob had come raging along Derby Street—he caught his breath in a gasp of amazement. The room was fantastic, astonishing.

It was the floor which held Carson's gaze. The dull gray of the circular wall gave place here to a mosaic of varicolored stone, in which blues and greens and purples predominated — indeed, there were none of the warmer colors. There must have been thousands of bits of colored stone making up that pattern, for none was larger than a walnut. And the mosaic seemed to follow some definite pattern, unfamiliar to Carson; there were curves of purple and violet mingled with angled lines of green and blue, intertwining in fantastic arabesques. There were circles, triangles, a pentagram, and other, less familiar, figures. Most of the lines and figures radiated from a definite point: the center of the chamber, where there

was a circular disk of dead black stone perhaps two feet in diameter.

It was very silent. The sounds of the cars that occasionally went past overhead in Derby Street could not be heard. In a shallow alcove in the wall Carson caught a glimpse of markings on the walls, and he moved slowly in that direction, the beam of his light traveling up and down the walls of the niche.

The marks, whatever they were, had been daubed upon the stone long ago, for what was left of the cryptic symbols was indecipherable. Carson saw several partly-effaced hieroglyphics which reminded him of Arabic, but he could not be sure. On the floor of the alcove was a corroded metal disk about eight feet in diameter, and Carson received the distinct impression that it was movable. But there seemed no way to lift it.

He became conscious that he was standing in the exact center of the chamber, in the circle of black stone where the odd design centered. Again he noticed the utter silence. On an impulse he clicked off the ray of his flashlight. Instantly he was in dead blackness.

At that moment a curious idea entered his mind. He pictured himself at the bottom of a pit, and from above a flood was descending, pouring down the shaft to engulf him. So strong was this impression that he actually fancied he could hear a muffled thundering, the roar of the cataract. Then, oddly shaken, he clicked on the light, glanced around swiftly. The drumming, of course, was the pounding of his blood, made audible in the complete silence—a familiar phenomenon. But, if the place was so still——

The thought leaped into his mind, as though suddenly thrust into his consciousness. This would be an ideal place to work. He could have the place wired for electricity, have a table and chair brought down, use an electric fan if necessary—although the musty odor he had first noticed seemed to have disappeared completely. He moved to the tunnel mouth, and as he stepped from the room he felt an inexplicable relaxation of his muscles, although he had not realized that they had been contracted. He ascribed it to nervousness, and went upstairs to brew black coffee and write to his landlord in Boston about his discovery.

THE visitor stared curiously about the hallway after Carson had opened the door, nodding to himself as though with satisfaction. He was a lean, tall figure of a man, with thick steel-gray eyebrows overhanging keen gray eyes. His face, although strongly marked and gaunt, was unwrinkled.

"About the Witch Room, I suppose?" Carson said ungraciously. His landlord had talked, and for the last week he had been unwillingly entertaining antiquaries and occultists anxious to glimpse the secret chamber in which Abbie Prinn had mumbled her spells. Carson's annoyance had grown, and he had considered moving to a quieter place; but his inherent stubbornness had made him stay on, determined to finish his novel in spite of interruptions. Now, eyeing his guest coldly, he said, "I'm sorry, but it's not on exhibition any more."

The other looked startled, but almost immediately a gleam of comprehension came into his eyes. He extracted a card and offered it to Carson.

"Michael Leigh . . . occultist, eh?" Carson repeated. He drew a deep breath. The occultists, he had found, were the worst, with their dark hints of nameless things and their profound interest in the mosaic pattern on the floor of the Witch Room. I'm sorry, Mr. Leigh, but—I'm really quite busy. You'll excuse me."

Ungraciously he turned back to the door.

"Just a moment," Leigh said swiftly.

Before Carson could protest he had caught the writer by the shoulders and was peering closely into his eyes. Startled, Carson drew back, but not before he had seen an extraordinary expression of mingled apprehension and satisfaction appear on Leigh's gaunt face. It was as though the occultist had seen something unpleasant—but not unexpected.

"What's the idea?" Carson asked harshly. "I'm not accustomed——"

"I'm very sorry," Leigh said. His voice was deep, pleasant. "I must apologize. I thought—well, again I apologize. I'm rather excited, I'm afraid. You see, I've come from San Francisco to see this Witch Room of yours. Would you really mind letting me see it? I should be glad to pay any sum——"

Carson made a deprecatory gesture.

"No," he said, feeling a perverse liking for this man growing within him—his well-modulated, pleasant voice, his powerful face, his magnetic personality. "No, I merely want a little peace—you have no idea how I've been bothered," he went on, vaguely surprized to find himself speaking apologetically. "It's a frightful nuisance. I almost wish I'd never found the room."

Leigh leaned forward anxiously. "May I see it? It means a great deal to me—I'm vitally interested in these things. I promise not to take up more than ten minutes of your time."

Carson hesitated, then assented. As he led his guest into the cellar he found himself telling the circumstances of his discovery of the Witch Room. Leigh listened intently, occasionally interrupting with questions.

"The rat—did you see what became of it?" he asked.

Carson looked surprized. "Why, no. I suppose it hid in its burrow. Why?"

"One never knows," Leigh said cryptically as they came into the Witch Room.

CARSON switched on the light. He had had an electrical extension installed, and there were a few chairs and a table, but otherwise the chamber was unchanged. Carson watched the occultist's face, and with surprize saw it become grim, almost angry.

Leigh strode to the center of the room, staring at the chair that stood on the black circle of stone.

"You work here?" he asked slowly.

"Yes. It's quiet—I found I couldn't work upstairs. Too noisy. But this is ideal—somehow I find it very easy to write here. My mind feels"—he hesitated—"free; that is, disassociated with other things. It's quite an unusual feeling."

Leigh nodded as though Carson's words had confirmed some idea in his own mind. He turned toward the alcove and the metal disk in the floor. Carson followed him. The occultist moved close to the wall, tracing out the faded symbols with a long forefinger. He muttered something under his breath—words that sounded like gibberish to Carson.

"Nyogtha . . . k'yarnak. . . ."

He swung about, his face grim and pale. "I've seen enough," he said softly. "Shall we go?"

Surprized, Carson nodded and led the way back into the cellar.

Upstairs Leigh hesitated, as though finding it difficult to broach his subject. At length he asked, "Mr. Carson—would you mind telling me if you have had any peculiar dreams lately."

Carson stared at him, mirth dancing in his eyes. "Dreams?" he repeated. "Oh—I see. Well, Mr. Leigh, I may as well tell you that you can't frighten me. Your

compatriots—the other occultists I've entertained—have already tried it."

Leigh raised his thick eyebrows. "Yes? Did they ask you whether you'd dreamed?"

"Several did—yes."

"And you told them?"

"No." Then as Leigh leaned back in his chair, a puzzled expression on his face, Carson went on slowly, "Although, really, I'm not quite sure."

"You mean?"

"I *think*—I have a vague impression—that I have dreamed lately. But I can't be sure. I can't remember anything of the dream, you see. And—oh, very probably your brother occultists put the idea into my mind!"

"Perhaps," Leigh said non-committally, getting up. He hesitated. "Mr. Carson, I'm going to ask you a rather presumptuous question. Is it necessary for you to live in this house."

Carson sighed resignedly. "When I was first asked that question I explained that I wanted a quiet place to work on a novel, and that any quiet place would do. But it isn't easy to find 'em. Now that I have this Witch Room, and I'm turning out my work so easily, I see no reason why I should move and perhaps upset my program. I'll vacate this house when I finish my novel, and then you occultists can come in and turn it into a museum or do whatever you want with it. I don't care. But until the novel is finished I intend to stay here."

Leigh rubbed his chin. "Indeed. I can understand your point of view. But—is there no other place in the house where you can work?"

He watched Carson's face for a moment, and then went on swiftly.

"I don't expect you to believe me. You are a materialist. Most people are. But there are a few of us who know that above and beyond what men call science there is a greater science that is built on laws and principles which to the average man would be almost incomprehensible. If you have read Machen you will remember that he speaks of the gulf between the world of consciousness and the world of matter. It is possible to bridge that gulf. The Witch Room is such a bridge! Do you know what a whispering-gallery is?"

"Eh?" Carson said, staring. "But there's no——"

"An analogy—merely an analogy. A man may whisper a word in a gallery—or a cave—and if you are standing in a certain spot a hundred feet away you will hear that whisper, although someone ten feet away will not. It's a simple trick of acoustics—bringing the sound to a focal point. And this principle can be applied to other things besides sound. To any wave impulse—*even to thought!*"

Carson tried to interrupt, but Leigh kept on.

"That black stone in the center of your Witch Room is one of those focal points. The design on the floor—when you sit on the black circle there you are abnormally sensitive to certain vibrations—certain thought commands — dangerously sensitive! Why do you suppose your mind is so clear when you are working there? A deception, a false feeling of lucidity—for you are merely an instrument, a microphone, tuned to pick up certain malign vibrations the nature of which you could not comprehend!"

Carson's face was a study in amazement and incredulity. "But—you don't mean you actually *believe*——"

Leigh drew back, the intensity fading from his eyes, leaving them grim and cold. "Very well. But I have studied the history of your Abigail Prinn. She, too, understood this super-science of which I speak. She used it for evil purposes—the black art, as it is called. I have read

that she cursed Salem in the old days—and a witch's curse can be a frightful thing. Will you——" He got up, gnawing at his lip. "Will you, at least, allow me to call on you tomorrow?"

Almost involuntarily Carson nodded. "But I'm afraid you'll be wasting your time. I don't believe—I mean, I have no——" He stumbled, at a loss for words.

"I merely wish to assure myself that you—oh, another thing. If you dream tonight, will you try to remember the dream? If you attempt to recapture it immediately after waking, it is often possible to recall it."

"All right. If I dream——"

That night Carson dreamed. He awoke just before dawn with his heart racing furiously and a curious feeling of uneasiness. Within the walls and from below he could hear the furtive scurryings of the rats. He got out of bed hastily, shivering in the cold grayness of early morning. A wan moon still shone faintly in a paling sky.

Then he remembered Leigh's words. He *had* dreamed—there was no question of that. But the content of his dream—that was another matter. He absolutely could not recall it to his mind, much as he tried, although there was a very vague impression of running frantically in darkness.

He dressed quickly, and because the stillness of early morning in the old house got on his nerves, went out to buy a newspaper. It was too early for shops to be open, however, and in search of a news-boy he set off westward, turning at the first corner. And as he walked a curious and inexplicable feeling began to take possession of him: a feeling of—familiarity! He had walked here before, and there was a dim and disturbing familiarity about the shapes of the houses, the outline of the roofs. But—and this was the fantastic part of it—to his knowledge he had never been on this street before. He had spent little time walking about this region of Salem, for he was indolent by nature; yet there was this extraordinary feeling of remembrance, and it grew more vivid as he went on.

He reached a corner, turned unthinkingly to the left. The odd sensation increased. He walked on slowly, pondering.

No doubt he *had* traveled by this way before—and very probably he had done so in a brown study, so that he had not been conscious of his route. Undoubtedly that was the explanation. Yet as Carson turned into Charter Street he felt a nameless uneasy waking within him. Salem was rousing; with daylight impassive Polish workers began to hurry past him toward the mills. An occasional automobile went by.

Before him a crowd was gathered on the sidewalk. He hastened his steps, conscious of a feeling of impending calamity. With an extraordinary sense of shock he saw that he was passing the Charter Street Burying Ground, the ancient, evilly famous "Burying Point." Hastily he pushed his way into the crowd.

Comments in a muffled undertone came to Carson's ears, and a bulky blue-clad back loomed up before him. He peered over the policeman's shoulder and caught his breath in a horrified gasp.

A man leaned against the iron railing that fenced the old graveyard. He wore a cheap, gaudy suit, and he gripped the rusty bars in a clutch that made the muscles stand out in ridges on the hairy back of his hands. He was dead, and on his face, staring up at the sky at a crazy angle, was frozen an expression of abysmal and utterly shocking horror. His eyes, all whites, were bulging hideously; his mouth was a twisted, mirthless grin.

A man at Carson's side turned a white face toward him. "Looks as if he was scared to death," he said somewhat hoarsely. "I'd hate to have seen what he saw. Ugh—look at that face!"

Mechanically Carson backed away, feeling an icy breath of nameless things chill him. He rubbed his hand across his eyes, but still that contorted, dead face swam in his vision. He began to retrace his steps, shaken and trembling a little. Involuntarily his glance moved aside, rested on the tombs and monuments that dotted the old graveyard. No one had been buried there for over a century, and the lichen-stained tombstones, with their winged skulls, fat-cheeked cherubs, and funereal urns, seemed to breathe out an indefinable miasma of antiquity. What had frightened the man to death?

CARSON drew a deep breath. True, the corpse had been a frightful spectacle, but he must not allow it to upset his nerves. He could not—his novel would suffer. Besides, he argued grimly to himself, the affair was obvious enough in its explanation. The dead man was apparently a Pole, one of the group of immigrants who dwell about Salem Harbor. Passing by the graveyard at night, a spot about which eldritch legends had clung for nearly three centuries, his drink-befuddled eyes must have given reality to the hazy phantoms of a superstitious mind. These Poles were notoriously unstable emotionally, prone to mob hysteria and wild imaginings. The great Immigrant Panic of 1853, in which three witch-houses had been burned to the ground, had grown from an old woman's confused and hysterical statement that she had seen a mysterious white-clad foreigner "take off his face." What else could be expected of such people, Carson thought?

Nevertheless he remained in a nervous state, and did not return home until nearly noon. When on his arrival he found Leigh, the occultist, waiting, he was glad to see the man, and invited him in with cordiality.

Leigh was very serious. "Did you hear about your friend Abigail Prinn?" he asked without preamble, and Carson stared, pausing in the act of siphoning charged water into a glass. After a long moment he pressed the lever, sent the liquid sizzling and foaming into the whisky. He handed Leigh the drink and took one himself—neat—before answering the question.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Has—what's she been up to?" he asked, with an air of forced levity.

"I've been checking up the records," Leigh said, "and I find Abigail Prinn was buried on December 14th, 1690, in the Charter Street Burying Ground—with a stake through her heart. What's the matter?"

"Nothing," Carson said tonelessly. "Well?"

"Well—her grave's been opened and robbed, that's all. The stake was found uprooted near by, and there were footprints all around the grave. Shoe-prints. Did you dream last night, Carson?" Leigh snapped out the question, his gray eyes hard.

"I don't know," Carson said confusedly, rubbing his forehead. "I can't remember. I was at the Charter Street graveyard this morning."

"Oh. Then you must have heard something about the man who——"

"I saw him," Carson interrupted, shuddering. "It upset me."

He downed the whisky at a gulp.

Leigh watched him. "Well," he said presently, "are you still determined to stay in this house?"

Carson put down the glass and stood up.

"Why not?" he snapped. "Is there any reason why I shouldn't? Eh?"

"After what happened last night——"

"After *what* happened? A grave was robbed. A superstitious Pole saw the robbers and died of fright. Well?"

"You're trying to convince yourself," Leigh said calmly. "In your heart you know — you must know — the truth. You've become a tool in the hands of tremendous and terrible forces, Carson. For three centuries Abbie Prinn has lain in her grave—*undead*—waiting for someone to fall into her trap—the Witch Room. Perhaps she foresaw the future when she built it, foresaw that some day someone would blunder into that hellish chamber and be caught by the trap of the mosaic pattern. It caught you, Carson—and enabled that undead horror to bridge the gulf between consciousness and matter, to get *en rapport* with you. Hypnotism is child's play to a being with Abigail Prinn's frightful powers. She could very easily force you to go to her grave and uproot the stake that held her captive, and then erase the memory of that act from your mind so that you could not remember it even as a dream!"

Carson was on his feet, his eyes burning with a strange light. "In God's name, man, do you know what you're saying?"

Leigh laughed harshly. "God's name! The devil's name, rather—the devil that menaces Salem at this moment; for Salem is in danger, terrible danger. The men and women and children of the town Abbie Prinn cursed when they bound her to the stake—and found they couldn't burn her! I've been going through certain secret archives this morning, and I've come to ask you, for the last time, to leave this house."

"Are you through?" Carson asked coldly. "Very well. I shall stay here. You're either insane or drunk, but you can't impress me with your poppycock."

"Would you leave if I offered you a thousand dollars?" Leigh asked. "Or more, then—ten thousand? I have a considerable sum at my command."

"No, damn it!" Carson snapped in a sudden blaze of anger. "All I want is to be left alone to finish my novel. I can't work anywhere else—I don't want to, I won't——"

"I expected this," Leigh said, his voice suddenly quiet, and with a strange note of sympathy. "Man, you can't get away! You're caught in the trap, and it's too late for you to extricate yourself so long as Abbie Prinn's brain controls you through the Witch Room. And the worst part of it is that she can only manifest herself with your aid — she drains your life forces, Carson, feeds on you like a vampire."

"You're mad," Carson said dully.

"I'm afraid. That iron disk in the Witch Room—I'm afraid of that, and what's under it. Abbie Prinn served strange gods, Carson—and I read something on the wall of that alcove that gave me a hint. Have you ever heard of Nyogtha?"

Carson shook his head impatiently. Leigh fumbled in a pocket, drew out a scrap of paper. "I copied this from a book in the Kester Library," he said, "a book called the *Necronomicon,* written by a man who delved so deeply into forbidden secrets that men called him mad. Read this."

CARSON's brows drew together as he read the excerpt:

Men know him as the Dweller in Darkness, that brother of the Old Ones called Nyogtha, the Thing that should not be. He can be summoned to Earth's surface through certain secret caverns and fissures, and sorcerers have seen him in Syria and below the black tower of Leng; from the Thang Grotto of Tartary he has come ravening to bring terror and destruction among the pavilions

of the great Khan. Only by the looped cross, by the Vach-Viraj incantation and by the Tikkoun elixir may he be driven back to the nighted caverns of hidden foulness where he dwelleth.

Leigh met Carson's puzzled gaze calmly. "Do you understand now?"

"Incantations and elixirs!" Carson said, handing back the paper. "Fiddlesticks!"

"Far from it. That incantation and that elixir have been known to occultists and adepts for thousands of years. I've had occasion to use them myself in the past on certain—occasions. And if I'm right about this thing——" He turned to the door, his lips compressed in a bloodless line. "Such manifestations have been defeated before, but the difficulty lies in obtaining the elixir—it's very hard to get. But I hope . . . I'll be back. Can you stay out of the Witch Room until then?"

"I'll promise nothing," Carson said. He had a dull headache, which had been steadily growing until it obtruded upon his consciousness, and he felt vaguely nauseated. "Good-bye."

He saw Leigh to the door and waited on the steps, with an odd reluctance to return to the house. As he watched the tall occultist hurry down the street, a woman came out of the adjoining house. She caught sight of him, and her huge breasts heaved. She burst into a shrill, angry tirade.

Carson turned, staring at her with astonished eyes. His head throbbed painfully. The woman was approaching, shaking a fat fist threateningly.

"Why you scare my Sarah?" she cried, her swarthy face flushed. "Why you scare her wit' your fool tricks, eh?"

Carson moistened his lips.

"I'm sorry," he said slowly. "Very sorry. I didn't frighten your Sarah. I haven't been home all day. What frightened her?"

"T'e brown t'ing—it ran in your house, Sarah say——"

The woman paused, and her jaw dropped. Her eyes widened. She made a peculiar sign with her right hand—pointing her index and little fingers at Carson, while her thumb was crossed over the other fingers. "T'e old witch!"

She retreated hastily, muttering in Polish in a frightened voice.

Carson turned, went back into the house. He poured some whisky into a tumbler, considered, and then set it aside untasted. He began to pace the floor, occasionally rubbing his forehead with fingers that felt dry and hot. Vague, confused thoughts raced through his mind. His head was throbbing and feverish.

At length he went down to the Witch Room. He remained there, although he did not work; for his headache was not so oppressive in the dead quiet of the underground chamber. After a time he slept.

How long he slumbered he did not know. He dreamed of Salem, and of a dimly-glimpsed, gelatinous black thing that hurtled with frightful speed through the streets, a thing like an incredibly huge, jet-black ameba that pursued and engulfed men and women who shrieked and fled vainly. He dreamed of a skull-face peering into his own, a withered and shrunken countenance in which only the eyes seemed alive, and they shone with a hellish and evil light.

He awoke at last, sat up with a start. He was very cold.

It was utterly silent. In the light of the electric bulb the green and purple mosaic seemed to writhe and contract toward him, an illusion which disappeared as his sleep-fogged vision cleared. He glanced at his wrist-watch. It was two o'clock. He had slept through the afternoon and the better part of the night.

He felt oddly weak, and a lassitude held him motionless in his chair. The

strength seemed to have been drained from him. The piercing cold seemed to strike through to his brain, but his headache was gone. His mind was very clear —expectant, as though waiting for something to happen. A movement near by caught his eye.

A slab of stone in the wall was moving. He heard a gentle grating sound, and slowly a black cavity widened from a narrow rectangle to a square. There was something crouching there in the shadow. Stark, blind horror struck through Carson as the thing moved and crept forward into the light.

It looked like a mummy. For an intolerable, age-long second the thought pounded frightfully at Carson's brain: *It looked like a mummy!* It was a skeleton-thin, parchment-brown corpse, and it looked like a skeleton with the hide of some great lizard stretched over its bones. It stirred, it crept forward, and its long nails scratched audibly against the stone. It crawled out into the Witch Room, its passionless face pitilessly revealed in the white light, and its eyes were gleaming with charnel life. He could see the serrated ridge of its brown, shrunken back. . . .

Carson sat motionless. Abysmal horror had robbed him of the power to move. He seemed to be caught in the fetters of dream-paralysis, in which the brain, an aloof spectator, is unable or unwilling to transmit the nerve-impulses to the muscles. He told himself frantically that he was dreaming, that he would presently awaken.

The withered horror arose. It stood upright, skeleton-thin, and moved to the alcove where the iron disk lay embedded in the floor. Standing with its back to Carson it paused, and a dry and sere whisper rustled out in the dead stillness. At the sound Carson would have screamed, but he could not. Still the dreadful whisper went on, in a language Carson knew was not of Earth, and as though in response an almost imperceptible quiver shook the iron disk.

It quivered and began to rise, very slowly, and as if in triumph the shriveled horror lifted its pipestem arms. The disk was nearly a foot thick, but presently as it continued to rise above the level of the floor an insidious odor began to penetrate the room. It was vaguely reptilian, musky and nauseating. The disk lifted inexorably, and a little finger of blackness crept out from beneath its edge. Abruptly Carson remembered his dream of a gelatinous black creature that hurtled through the Salem streets. He tried vainly to break the fetters of paralysis that held him motionless. The chamber was darkening, and a black vertigo was creeping up to engulf him. The room seemed to rock.

Still the iron disk lifted; still the withered horror stood with its skeleton arms raised in blasphemous benediction; still the blackness oozed out in slow ameboid movement.

There came a sound breaking through the sere whisper of the mummy, the quick patter of racing footsteps. Out of the corner of his eye Carson saw a man come racing into the Witch Room. It was the occultist, Leigh, and his eyes were blazing in a face of deathly pallor. He flung himself past Carson to the alcove where the black horror was surging into view.

THE withered thing turned with dreadful slowness. Leigh carried some implement in his left hand, Carson saw, a *crux ansata* of gold and ivory. His right hand was clenched at his side. His voice rolled out, sonorous and commanding. There were little beads of perspiration on his white face.

"Ya na kadishtu nilgh'ri . . . stell'hsna

kn'aa Nyogtha . . . k'yarnak phlegethor. . . ."

The fantastic, unearthly syllables thundered out, echoing from the walls of the vault. Leigh advanced slowly, the *crux ansata* held high. And from beneath the iron disk black horror came surging!

The disk was lifted, flung aside, and a great wave of iridescent blackness, neither liquid nor solid, a frightful gelatinous mass, came pouring straight for Leigh. Without pausing in his advance he made a quick gesture with his right hand, and a little glass tube hurtled at the black thing, was engulfed.

The formless horror paused. It hesitated, with a dreadful air of indecision, and then swiftly drew back. A choking stench of burning corruption began to pervade the air, and Carson saw great pieces of the black thing flake off, shriveling as though destroyed with corroding acid. It fled back in a liquescent rush, hideous black flesh dropping as it retreated.

A pseudopod of blackness elongated itself from the central mass and like a great tentacle clutched the corpse-like being, dragged it back to the pit and over the brink. Another tentacle seized the iron disk, pulled it effortlessly across the floor, and as the horror sank from sight, the disk fell into place with a thunderous crash.

The room swung in wide circles about Carson, and a frightful nausea clutched him. He made a tremendous effort to get to his feet, and then the light faded swiftly and was gone. Darkness took him.

CARSON'S novel was never finished. He burned it, but continued to write, although none of his later work was ever published. His publishers shook their heads and wondered why such a brilliant writer of popular fiction had suddenly become infatuated with the weird and ghastly.

"It's powerful stuff," one man told Carson, as he handed back his novel, *Black God of Madness.* "It's remarkable in its way, but it's morbid and horrible. Nobody would read it. Carson, why don't you write the type of novel you used to do, the kind that made you famous?"

It was then that Carson broke his vow never to speak of the Witch Room, and he poured out the entire story, hoping for understanding and belief. But as he finished, his heart sank as he saw the other's face, sympathetic but skeptical.

"You dreamed it, didn't you?" the man asked, and Carson laughed bitterly.

"Yes—I dreamed it."

"It must have made a terribly vivid impression on your mind. Some dreams do. But you'll forget about it in time," he predicted, and Carson nodded.

And because he knew that he would only be arousing doubts of his sanity, he did not mention the thing that was burned indelibly on his brain, the horror he had seen in the Witch Room after awakening from his faint. Before he and Leigh had hurried, white-faced and trembling, from the chamber, Carson had cast a quick glance behind him. The shriveled and corroded patches that he had seen slough off from that being of insane blasphemy had unaccountably disappeared, although they had left black stains upon the stones. Abbie Prinn, perhaps, had returned to the hell she had served, and her inhuman god had withdrawn to hidden abysses beyond man's comprehension, routed by powerful forces of elder magic which the occultist had commanded. But the witch had left a memento behind her, a hideous thing which Carson, in that last backward glance, had seen protruding from the edge of the iron disk, as though raised in ironic salute—*a withered, claw-like hand!*

The Wind From the River

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

The mystery of Arthur Grandison's death was solved one eery night when the wind blew strong from the river

RELEASING the telephone into the deferential Barnaby's hands, Miss Leocadie van Brugh turned to the window, where she watched the afterglow fan upward into the evening sky. Her gaze fell to the river, showing saffron in the afterglow through bushes and trees at the garden's end, the river in which Arthur Grandison had drowned himself a week before. For the moment, her face was expressionless, but presently her mouth became grim. She left the window abruptly, sweeping from the room into the hall and on up the stairs, her long satin skirts rustling sibilantly. She pushed open her sister's door and entered the room.

Lavinia van Brugh sat at her dressing-table looking at the evening paper. She did not turn at Leocadie's entrance, though she glanced up at her reflection in the mirror.

"Henry just called," Leocadie said. "The district attorney's on his way up again."

"But what can they think?" protested Lavinia. "Accident or suicide—surely not murder!"

Leocadie's eyes were inscrutable. "I'm not sure it wasn't murder. I know what *they* think. They think perhaps some of us know something about his death that we aren't telling. They know Arthur didn't get along too well with all of us, which is quite true; I know he was uncomfortable here among his stepmother's sisters. In my opinion, they suspect Walter of knowing too much."

"That's nonsense," said Lavinia sharply, "even though they were stepbrothers, and their tastes different. There's no shadow of motive for Walter's wanting Arthur out of the way."

Leocadie held up her hand for silence. "No one has suggested that, Lavinia."

Lavinia moved away from the dressing-table, swinging her body impatiently and murmuring under her breath. Her handsome face was flushed. She stood for a short time twisting her fingers together, then began to caress her dark hair and turned again to her sister.

Leocadie continued to look at Lavinia, her black eyes blanketing the younger woman. A half-smile hovered about her lips; then her eyes hardened, and she said, "It seems odd to me that you should suddenly be defending Walter, when you've hated him so long."

Lavinia's fierce gaze answered Leocadie, who closed her eyes to it, her lids sinking gently downward.

"Be ready, Lavinia, if the district attorney should want to speak to you," she said, and turned to leave the room.

THE door closed and Lavinia was left alone. Her eyes softened, the fire dying out of them abruptly. She went quickly to the dressing-table, put her face close to the mirror and began to scrutinize her reflection carefully.

Leocadie advanced gravely down the hall to the door of Walter Grandison's room, where she knocked.

"What is it?" Walter called.

"Aunt Leocadie, dear," she replied, entering the room.

There he sat, handsome and dark: the van Brugh in him, Leocadie thought fleetingly. His eyebrows raised questioningly toward her. He did not rise, for one hand was engaged with the tone control of the radio, and he was listening to Rachmaninoff's *C Minor Concerto.*

Leocadie had already thought how she must approach him, for he had not seen the papers, and, having closed the door and come forward, she said, "I thought it would be better for me to see you before the district attorney came."

He was apparently not surprized, and his interest was only casual when he asked, "What's he coming for?"

"Arthur's death. They think it may not have been suicide." Her eyes challenged his, but he was stronger; she looked away, somewhat disconcerted be-

"He was behind you when you came down the stairs."

cause he had betrayed no sign of alarm.

"I've been thinking of that myself," he said. "I don't believe he drowned himself, either. Arthur was an excellent swimmer; suicide that way doesn't seem natural."

Leocadie did not know what to say. She sat down and looked at her nephew until he turned away. Then she said, "He'll most likely want to speak to you about it."

"But I don't know anything."

"They'll want to speak to all of us. Your Uncle Henry telephoned. I myself think it's unnecessary, but we must submit to it."

She got up and went to the door, where she turned to add, "Be ready. I'll try to prevent it, but I don't think that will help."

Then she was gone, hearing his "Thanks, Aunt Leocadie," only faintly through the door.

He got quickly to his feet, shut off the radio, and went to the window, where he stood looking down at the river, a troubled frown on his forehead. So they had begun to be suspicious! he thought.

The district attorney was shown into the long hall just as Leocadie came down the stairs, her presence engulfing him. A ticklish business, he thought, but it must be done. He met her quite genially, and she smiled, leading the way into the library, where, she explained, they could talk undisturbed. And there he immediately began, speaking rapidly, for he was obviously in a hurry, as Leocadie saw by his frequent glances at his wrist-watch.

"It seems to all of us very peculiar that the boy should have gone off at night and drowned himself—if he *did*—without a motive, except the discontent he had been manifesting. I understand how unpleasant this must be for you, but we must continue investigating until we are satisfied. You know, there were certain marks about the neck—in back—almost as if he had been held under the water, and we understand he was an excellent swimmer."

Thus he went on, with Leocadie smiling, her eyes dreamily half closed, now and then putting in a word of affirmation or doubt. From her he got nothing, and from Lavinia only ill-concealed scorn. Walter was confused, and the district attorney was obviously satisfied that he had at least touched upon something, since the young man carried on as if he were concealing some vital fact he could not bring himself to say, particularly with his aunts looking implacably on.

Finally the district attorney left, determined to speak to Walter alone sometime. This, however, was not to be, for a shocking crime took the district attorney's attention for long weeks, and Arthur Grandison's death had been cleared up in a strange way when again that officer was ready to give his mind to the problem.

Leocadie watched the district attorney leave, her mind troubled; his visit, his cautious questions had planted a doubt in her, and this doubt was to grow until at last she began to feel for the truth. And the immediate failure of the appointed officer in probing the matter somehow opened another door, one that was usually kept closed, a door no one specifically recognized, no one saw — for justice shapes its own ends.

Two nights after the district attorney's disturbing visit, the first suggestion was vouchsafed them. A wind from the river was blowing, the first wind to break the even July heat, and its damp coolness came as a relief. Leocadie entered the dining-room just before dinner and found Emma setting table. The maid had set for four, but Leocadie did

not at first notice this discrepancy. Suddenly seeing the fourth plate, she assumed that Lavinia or Walter had a caller, but asked, "Why are there four places, Emma?"

Emma replied that Barnaby had said there would be an extra place.

Leocadie sought out Barnaby, finding him in the library where he was putting the books in order.

"Do we have a guest for dinner tonight, Barnaby?" she asked.

He looked at her as if he had not understood. Then, feeling that he was not being reproved, he ventured, "I thought perhaps the young man was staying."

Leocadie said, "Oh, a friend of Walter's, I suppose."

Barnaby looked dismayed. "I saw him with you just before."

Leocadie's surprize was too genuine to doubt. "With me?"

"Why, yes, Miss Leocadie. I saw him with you. He was behind you when you came downstairs."

"But that can't be, Barnaby. You didn't let any such man in, did you?"

"No, Miss Leocadie. But I saw him quite clearly."

"Ah, well, no harm done. I can't understand, though, how you could make such a mistake."

Vague alarm began to stir Barnaby. "But—there *was* a young man, wasn't there?"

Realizing that he was serious, she asked, "Can you describe him?"

He hesitated. "Not very well. He had long yellowish hair and was tall—his face was shadowed."

He broke off, for a swift change had come over her.

"Barnaby, such a thing must not happen again." Her voice was sharp and hard. "See to it that Emma removes the extra plate. You've made a mistake."

Then she swept out of the room with a hurried eagerness unlike her.

Barnaby explained to Emma, giving voice to his amazement. And then a change came over Emma, too.

"What was that?" she asked suddenly. "A tall man—with yellow hair?"

He nodded and would have gone on, but she stopped him. "No wonder Miss Leocadie was sharp with you; you described Arthur!"

Leocadie hinted at Barnaby's disturbing mistake to Lavinia, who brushed it aside. "I declare, Leocadie, I'm beginning to think you've let his death go to your head."

That was all from her. Walter, too, should know, but he, patting her soft hands, said only, "You know, Barnaby's been reading occult books, Aunt Leocadie—and he could imagine anything. Only the other night he swore he had seen a pair of ancient specters duelling in the garden," which was disgracefully untrue, but served to reassure Leocadie, even though she did not for an instant believe it.

DINNER was strained that night, with Lavinia unnaturally gay, striving to drive the dismal thought of Arthur's tragic death from their minds, and succeeding only in making them more conscious of it.

After dinner, Walter left to attend a concert downtown, and Lavinia had an engagement; so that Leocadie was left alone. She sat in the library reading for an hour, when she heard Barnaby advancing from the servants' quarters. Presently he was crossing the hall.

He seemed to hesitate a moment; then his voice sounded. "Will you want anything more tonight, Mr. Grandison?"

There was no answer, and after a few moments Barnaby came into the library, grumbling to himself.

Leocadie sat like stone, waiting for Barnaby to speak. He did not; so it was left for her to say something.

"To whom were you speaking just now, Barnaby?" she asked.

"To Mr. Walter, Miss van Brugh."

"I heard. Where was Walter?"

"Going up the stairs. I'm sorry if I disturbed you."

Leocadie forced herself to go on. "You didn't disturb me. But Walter went to a concert tonight and hasn't yet come back."

There was nothing for Barnaby to reply. He mumbled something and backed out of the room. From beyond the door came the very audible sound of an oath, which served in a measure to relieve the tension that had come upon Leocadie. She listened, heard Barnaby go cautiously up the stairs, and assumed that he was going to ascertain whether or not he had erred. She knew that Walter had not come in, for she would have heard him from the library. Impulsively she rose and followed Barnaby up the stairs. She saw his dark form standing next one of the doors along the hall on the second floor. But it was not Walter's door—it was Lavinia's.

"You might have believed me, Barnaby," said Leocadie gently.

He did not turn. Then it came to her that he was not wearing Barnaby's clothes. At the same moment Barnaby's voice answered her from the opposite direction, and she turned to see him coming from Walter's room, murmuring apologetically, "I just had to see. I know I saw someone, Miss Leocadie; I know I did."

Leocadie put out a hand to steady herself, and turned again, warily, her eyes seeking Lavinia's door. *There was nothing there!* Barnaby came swiftly to her side, anxious, demanding to know if he had frightened her. Leocadie dismissed him and retired to her room.

There she sat in silence, her thoughts confused. Presently she rose again, opened the door slightly and peered out into the dimly lit hall. There was nothing to disturb its quiet save the gentle sound of the wind from the river. Abruptly, Leocadie opened the door wide and went out into the hall, passed down its length and went into Lavinia's room. Lavinia was not yet there. Leocadie put on the bed-lamp and sank down upon the bed to wait and tell her what had happened.

Then her eyes caught sight of an envelope hastily pushed under the mattress. She drew it out, noticing that it was not addressed save for a barely legible "Vinnie" scrawled in the lower corner: a letter most probably delivered by hand. Leocadie, thinking it nothing more than a social invitation, for Lavinia was still young and popular, drew out the letter and read it.

My darling Vinnie: Perhaps I shouldn't write that, now you say we cannot go on—but I can't help it. I must see you again—must, must, *must!* There will be some way for me—don't force me to sink so low as to threaten. May I see you tonight in the garden, at the lavender lilacs?

ARTHUR.

For a moment Leocadie looked at the signature as it were from somewhere far out in space, every faculty suspended in the suffocating knowledge that pressed in upon her. Then abruptly her hands began to tremble, her lips quivered, and she looked wildly at the reflection of her distraught face in the mirror of the dressing-table opposite. She replaced the letter and put out the light. She left the room, confused, her mind a tumult of conflict.

In her own room again, she sat for a long time striving to calm herself, to discipline her unruly thoughts. She heard Lavinia come in, and waited in apprehensive stillness to see whether Lavinia

would notice anything; for already she had begun to think that she had not properly replaced the letter. But there was no sound from Lavinia's room, and Leocadie's thoughts began to take a more definite form. One thought stood out above the rest: she had unwittingly stumbled upon a shocking secret which might well prove motive for Arthur's suicide. If the letter were made public, it might establish enough motive to induce the district attorney to drop the investigation—but it was manifestly impossible to let the letter come out.

After a while she began to think back, to wonder how she could have been so blind. True, she had thought once or twice that Lavinia had championed Arthur much too aggressively, but this she had believed accounted for by Lavinia's hatred of Walter. And Lavinia had been very casual about Arthur for some time before his death. Disturbed, Leocadie thrust the matter from her, promising herself that she would speak to Lavinia.

In the morning the wind from the river still blew. The sky was overcast, threatening rain. Leocadie did not speak to Lavinia, though memory of Arthur's letter was still vividly with her. She was held back by a growing hesitation and reluctance, thinking it might be better to let the matter rest for ever. It was not likely that further investigation would disclose anything, and if it did, she could explain to Henry, and he could dissuade the district attorney.

During the day the wind abated and, after a short warm rain, a thick fog began to move up from the river, shrouding the old house in a damp whiteness at dusk.

At dinner, Lavinia was unaccountably nervous.

"The fog," she explained, when Leocadie wondered. "I can't stand it—too damp. And there's a storm coming up."

Leocadie ordered Barnaby to make the rounds and close all the windows but those in her room.

"And mine," added Walter.

The early evening hours dragged. Lavinia had suggested that they sit up and wait for the storm to pass, but Walter had paid no attention to her suggestion and had gone immediately to his room to read. The storm did not want to come, and at last Leocadie persuaded her sister to go to bed. Lavinia consented, insisting that the storm would most likely come as soon as she was ready to sleep, which it did.

Leocadie had not yet gone to bed when the storm broke. She was sitting in darkness near the window, clad in her long night-gown and dressing-robe. She drew the curtain half-way, and continued to watch lightning play across the sky. Pouring rain quickly dispelled the fog, and lightning illumined a dripping garden beyond the window. Despite its violence, the storm did not last. Moving toward her bed, Leocadie saw that her door stood ajar, and went over to close it.

It was then that she heard a muffled scream from her sister's room. In a second she was in the hall running toward Lavinia's room. She entered without warning. Lavinia was crouched against the bedstead, staring with wide eyes in the direction of her dressing-table. Her bed-lamp was on.

Leocadie was astonished. "Why, Lavinia, whatever's the matter?"

For a few moments Lavinia could not answer, her lips moving but no words coming. Then she said, "He's gone now, Leocadie."

"What are you talking about?"

"It was Walter, I think. I had just dropped off to sleep when I thought I saw something near the dressing-table—a man—Walter."

Leocadie grumbled in disbelief and

eyed her sister fixedly. She went forward after a moment and pulled the cord for the central light, making the room bright with illumination.

"Where did you think you saw someone?" she asked, her voice edged and cold.

"A little to the right."

Leocadie went forward and stood where Lavinia indicated. Almost at her feet was a large wet spot on the carpet. Leocadie looked quickly up at the ceiling to see whether rain had seeped through; there was nothing to indicate that it had. Then she looked back at the wet spot on the carpet, and Lavinia, following her glance, saw it, too. She sprang from bed and came over to her sister.

"I don't know how that could have got there," said Leocadie.

But Lavinia did not immediately answer. She continued to stare at the wet place, and finally murmured, "I thought —I could have sworn——" Then she was silent; the color drained abruptly from her face. She glanced quickly at Leocadie and said, "I know—I dropped a bottle of toilet water there just before I went to bed. The thunder gave me a scare."

Leocadie did not reply. She stood for a moment silently regarding Lavinia, feeling that something was rising between them, something for which she could not account, but about which a horrible suspicion was growing. She went from the room knowing that Lavinia was deliberately lying, for she had smelled the wetness on the floor, and it was not toilet water nor was it rain—it was that vague but clearly definable river smell.

Leocadie did not sleep very well that night, and the occasional movements in Lavinia's room told her that her sister was not sleeping either. In the morning, the evidence of Lavinia's dark-ringed eyes convinced her that Lavinia was deeply troubled. She pondered again speaking to her younger sister about the letter from Arthur, but once more she dismissed the suggestion, half afraid to mention it.

NEITHER of them left the house during the day. At dusk, Lavinia spoke vaguely about a change, mentioned distant Natchez once or twice, and wondered whether she ought not to take a trip. Leocadie was oddly silent; she had no suggestion to offer.

When Barnaby came into the library where they sat, Lavinia spoke to him.

"How does the weather look, Barnaby?"

"Cool, Miss Lavinia. And there's that wind from the river again tonight—strange how it's kept up for three days now."

When Lavinia spoke again, her voice was subdued. "You'd better close the windows again; I don't feel well, and that wind's frightfully damp. Don't you think so, Leocadie?"

"No, I must say I don't, Lavinia. In fact, I like the wind from the river; it's fresh."

"It seems to me the atmosphere in this house has got very chilly and damp of late," replied Lavinia. "It may be I'm coming down with something, but I'm uncomfortable in all this dampness."

"That's possible, I suppose," Leocadie said. "For myself, I must say I notice no change; the house is as dry as it always was. Tinder, as Henry would say."

Irritated, Lavinia left the library, and Leocadie, mildly concerned, listened to her footsteps retreat up the stairs. After a while she, too, went to her room. Despite the wind, the night was still, save for the rhythmic chorus of hylas and peepers from the river. To their music Leocadie fell asleep.

Shortly after midnight, Leocadie awoke to the sound of violent struggle from

Lavinia's room. Without stopping to put on her dressing-robe, she ran from her room to Lavinia's. She found her sister thrashing wildly about in her bed, her clenched fists flailing the air, occasionally striking the bedstead. In a moment, Walter came. He had not yet undressed for bed, and had been drawn by Leocadie's quick passage down the hall and by Lavinia's struggle, audible to him after Leocadie had opened Lavinia's door.

Frantically Leocadie tore the covers from Lavinia's face, and Walter succeeded in catching her arms and holding them. Between them, they quieted her, though both were alarmed at the awful pallor of Lavinia's face, at her staring eyes.

"Good God! What is it, Aunt Leocadie?" asked Walter.

"I don't know," she answered tersely, eyes on Lavinia, whose breathing was easier now.

"Has she ever had an attack like this before?"

Leocadie shook her head.

Lavinia's eyes began to flutter; her mouth twisted in a sudden spasm of agony. Then she opened her eyes wide and looked around. Fixing her gaze on Leocadie, she gasped, "*He* was here again —over there—by the dressing-table."

"What happened to you?" Leocadie demanded. "We found you almost smothered beneath the covers."

"We thought you were suffocated, Aunt Vinnie," Walter put in.

"He did it," Lavinia said shortly, her voice unnaturally shrill. "He came over and held the covers on my mouth—I couldn't breathe—I couldn't!"

Walter looked at her in amazement. Catching his eye, Leocadie shaped the word *delirious* with her lips and motioned him from the room. He went reluctantly.

Instantly Leocadie turned to her sister, shook her roughly by the shoulders, and said, "What are you talking about, Lavinia! Walter wasn't out of his room all evening."

Lavinia began to laugh soundlessly, without mirth. She did not reply, but in answer to the mounting concern in Leocadie's eyes she pointed weakly to the floor.

"Look there!" she said, her voice harsh and strained.

Leocadie followed the direction of her sister's finger and saw a long trail of glistening dampness leading from the dressing-table to the bed.

Lavinia's voice came to her. "It wasn't Walter. It was—the other." Then abruptly, fearing she had said too much, she added, "I'm all right now, Leocadie. If I need you, I'll call."

Leocadie left the room and went directly down the hall to tap on the door of Walter's room. He had been waiting for her, for he flung open the door at once, and Leocadie entered.

"I've something to ask you, Walter," she began at once when he had closed the door, "and I want you to tell me the truth—don't think to spare my feelings."

Walter looked at her askance, asking, "What is it?"

"What was there between Arthur and Lavinia?"

He avoided her gaze, turning abruptly to stand against the window peering out. Leocadie waited until he said, "They were in love, Aunt Leocadie."

"That isn't all, is it?"

"Yes—except that it died down in Aunt Lavinia, but not in Arthur. I think he might have killed himself on her account." His voice was intense and sub-

dued. "But I don't think he would have done it without killing her first. He was too selfish."

"You believe he was murdered, then?"

He hesitated long, then replied in a barely audible voice, "Yes."

"Do you have any idea of who might have—killed Arthur?" she asked, her caution manifest.

He turned and faced her, searching her eyes for any hint of her thoughts. Baffled, he said shortly, "Yes, I have."

"Who?"

His answer came immediately. "I can't tell you."

She made no attempt to persuade him, knowing how futile this would be, but remained standing for a few moments in deep thought. Then she turned with a quick "Good-night" and left the room.

She listened for a moment at Lavinia's door, but no sound came from the room save her sister's regular breathing. Lavinia slept, and as Leocadie moved from the door, her eyes caught sight of the thin line of light showing beneath it at the threshold; Lavinia had gone to sleep with the light on. Leocadie thought for a moment of opening the door and putting the light out. Then it came to her disturbingly that Lavinia had left the light on deliberately.

In the morning, both of them appeared with drawn faces. To the coming night they looked forward with unvoiced dread. When Lavinia half-heartedly mentioned travel again, Leocadie unexpectedly supported the plan at once; so that within a few hours, Lavinia found her trip planned in detail, her sister adding the suggestion that she leave at once next morning, to which Lavinia eagerly assented. They retired late that night with spirits considerably lightened.

Leocadie had not been long asleep when her troubled mind was beset by a dream. It seemed to her that the wind from the river was blowing stronger and stronger, gathering violence in the night. It was blowing against the house, drawing something from the river, something that came through the garden shrouded in shadows, itself a shadow, and passed soundlessly through the walls of the house. Now it was on the stairs, a tall figure moving fleetly and purposefully up the back stairs and into the hall beyond the room in which Leocadie tossed uneasily in troubled sleep. It drifted along the hall until it came to Lavinia's room, where it paused. Then it was gone, and in the dream there was sudden confusion. This presently gave way to Lavinia's room. Leocadie could see her younger sister sleeping—but next the bed stood the figure that had ridden the wind from the river, a grim dark shadow looking down. Now it was bending over Lavinia, touching her with long thin fingers that dripped water. Lavinia awoke, her eyes wide with terror. She opened her lips to scream, but the thing at the bed prevented any sound from leaving her lips, paralyzing her with its strange, sinister power. Then a voice came out of the leaden dusk of the dream: "I've come for you, Vinnie." The voice descended as from a great height, sounding and resounding in the dim chambers of Leocadie's sleep. Then Lavinia rose, her movements dictated by the thing that had come from the river. It turned from her, slowly, and began to move from the room, Lavinia stumbling mechanically after, her eyes fixed, her mind numb with awful fear.

Then Leocadie awoke. She lay for a few moments recalling the warm, familiar aspects of her room; then she rose abruptly and swung herself out of bed. The white curtains at her slightly open win-

dow were tossing wildly, and Leocadie, lowering the window entirely, saw that the wind from the river had indeed become more violent. She peered anxiously upward, hoping that another storm might not come, and was reassured. Clouds were scudding swiftly across the sky, and in brief moments the moon was revealed. She looked down at the corner of the garden visible from her window, and had a momentary flash of two people crossing her vision behind the lilac bush —a man and a woman!

At almost the same moment she was conscious of someone running down the hall. She turned from the window to face a pounding at her door and Walter's anxious voice: "Aunt Leocadie, are you awake?"

She threw open the door. Walter was standing there.

"Aunt Vinnie's gone," he said.

For a moment Leocadie stood rooted. Then she strode forward, seeing already that Lavinia's door stood wide, and went down the hall into Lavinia's room.

There was no one there, as Walter had said. The bed-lamp was on, and its soft radiance showed that Lavinia's bed had been slept in; for it was rumpled, the covers thrown carelessly back.

The memory of her dream came vividly to Leocadie; she ran to the window, where she could have an unobstructed view of the garden and the river beyond.

Far down the garden path, almost at the river's edge, there were two figures. One of them was Lavinia, walking stiffly along, led by a tall, thin figure that seemed a part of the shadowy blackness of the lilac bushes. Leocadie swayed, catching her hands in the heavy curtains at the window.

Walter came quickly over to her.

Who was it—down there? Leocadie forced herself to look again, fixing her reluctant eyes upon the two figures below. Then the moon came out and its light betrayed the two at the river's edge. With Lavinia was a man with yellow hair!

"Arthur!" exclaimed Walter involuntarily.

Leocadie clenched her hands, fighting for self-control.

"It was Lavinia," she whispered harshly, understanding now for the first time how Arthur had come to his death, how his threat to reveal his love for Lavinia had driven her. "It was Lavinia! *She killed Arthur!"* She turned wildly and ran from the room, shouting hysterically to Walter to follow. "Come, quickly—the river!"

As they ran through the hall, Walter noticed what had at first escaped Leocadie: the long wet path down the carpet, leading down the back stairs. The hall was heavy with the thick night-odor of the river.

Though they ran fleetly from the house, across the garden to the river, they were too late. Lavinia was dead. She lay on the river's edge, her long dark hair trailing in the water, which lapped gently against her still white face. She had been strangled. In the pale moonlight Leocadie and Walter could see strand after strand of rich yellow hair wound about her throat, the same yellow hair that had been Arthur Grandison's greatest pride.

The Horror in the Burying-Ground

By HAZEL HEALD

A bizarre and outré story of a gruesome happening in the old town of Stillwater—a blood-chilling tale of a double burial

WHEN the state highway to Rutland is closed, travelers are forced to take the old Stillwater road past Swamp Hollow. The scenery is superb in places, yet somehow the route has been unpopular for years. There is something depressing about it, especially near Stillwater itself. Motorists feel subtly uncomfortable about the tightly shuttered farmhouse on the knoll just north of the village, and about the white-bearded half-wit who haunts the old burying-ground on the south, apparently talking to the occupants of some of the graves.

Not much is left of Stillwater, now. The soil is played out, and most of the people have drifted to the towns across the distant river or to the city beyond the distant hills. The steeple of the old white church has fallen down, and half of the twenty-odd straggling houses are empty and in various stages of decay. Normal life is found only around Peck's general store and filling-station, and it is here that the curious stop now and then to ask about the shuttered house and the idiot who mutters to the dead.

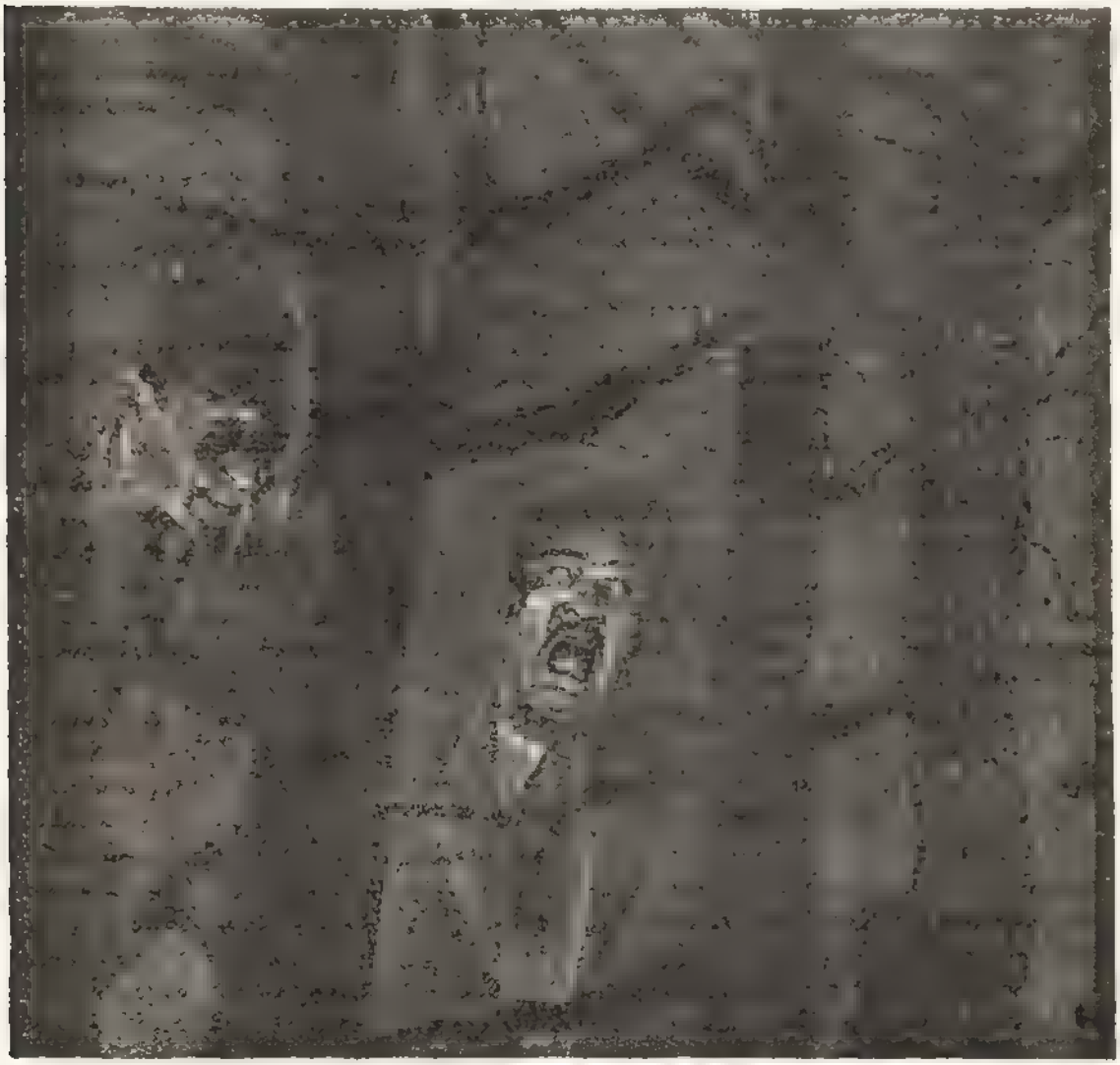
Most of the questioners come away with a touch of distaste and disquiet. They find the shabby loungers oddly unpleasant and full of unnamed hints in speaking of the long-past events brought up. There is a menacing, portentous quality in the tones which they use to describe very ordinary events—a seemingly unjustified tendency to assume a furtive, suggestive, confidential air, and to fall into awesome whispers at certain points—which insidiously disturbs the listener. Old Yankees often talk like that; but in this case the melancholy aspect of the half-moldering village, and the dismal nature of the story unfolded, give these gloomy, secretive mannerisms an added significance. One feels profoundly the quintessential horror that lurks behind the isolated Puritan and his strange repressions—feels it, and longs to escape precipitately into clearer air.

The loungers whisper impressively that the shuttered house is that of old Miss

● Four years ago Hazel Heald made her bow to the readers of Weird Tales with an eery story called "The Horror in the Museum," which established her at once among the most popular writers of weird fiction. She followed this with "Winged Death," a story of the African tse-tse fly, and another tale of a weird monster from "the dark backward and abysm of time." The story published here, "The Horror in the Burying-Ground," is as weird and compelling as anything this talented author has yet written. We recommend this fascinating story to you, for we know you will not be disappointed in it.

Sprague—Sophie Sprague, whose brother Tom was buried on the seventeenth of June, back in '85. Sophie was never the same after that funeral—that and the other thing which happened the same day—and in the end she took to staying in all the time. Won't even be seen now, but leaves notes under the back-door mat and has her things brought from the store by Ned Peck's boy. Afraid of something—the old Swamp Hollow burying-ground most of all. Never could be dragged near there since her brother—and the other one—were laid away. Not much wonder, though, seeing the way crazy Johnny Dow rants. He hangs around the burying-ground all day and sometimes at night, and claims he talks with Tom—and the other. Then he marches by Sophie's house and shouts things at her—that's why she began to keep the shutters closed. He says things are coming from somewhere to get her sometime. Ought to be stopped, but one can't be too hard on poor Johnny. Besides, Steve Barbour always had his opinions.

Johnny does his talking to two of the



"Then there was that awful 'Comin' again some day,' in a death-like squawk."

graves. One of them is Tom Sprague's. The other, at the opposite end of the graveyard, is that of Henry Thorndike, who was buried on the same day. Henry was the village undertaker—the only one in miles—and never liked around Stillwater. A city fellow from Rutland—been to college and full of book learning. Read queer things nobody else ever heard of, and mixed chemicals for no good purpose. Always trying to invent something new—some new-fangled embalming-fluid or some foolish kind of medicine. Some folks said he had tried to be a doctor but failed in his studies and took to the next best profession. Of course, there wasn't much undertaking to do in a place like Stillwater, but Henry farmed on the side.

Mean, morbid disposition—and a secret drinker if you could judge by the empty bottles in his rubbish heap. No wonder Tom Sprague hated him and blackballed him from the Masonic lodge, and warned him off when he tried to make up to Sophie. The way he experimented on animals was against nature and Scripture. Who could forget the state that collie dog was found in, or what happened to old Mrs. Akeley's cat? Then there was the matter of Deacon Leavitt's calf, when Tom had led a band of the village boys to demand an accounting. The curious thing was that the calf came alive after all in the end, though Tom had found it as stiff as a poker. Some said the joke was on Tom, but Thorndike probably thought otherwise, since he had gone down under his enemy's fist before the mistake was discovered.

Tom, of course, was half drunk at the time. He was a vicious brute at best, and kept his poor sister half cowed with threats. That's probably why she is such a fear-racked creature still. There were only the two of them, and Tom would never let her leave because that meant splitting the property. Most of the fellows were too afraid of him to shine up to Sophie—he stood six feet one in his stockings—but Henry Thorndike was a sly cuss who had ways of doing things behind folk's backs. He wasn't much to look at, but Sophie never discouraged him any. Mean and ugly as he was, she'd have been glad if anybody could have freed her from her brother. She may not have stopped to wonder how she could get clear of him after he got her clear of Tom.

WELL, that was the way things stood in June of '86. Up to this point, the whisperers of the loungers at Peck's store are not so unbearably portentous; but as they continue, the element of secretiveness and malign tension grows. Tom Sprague, it appears, used to go to Rutland on periodic sprees, his absences being Henry Thorndike's great opportunities. He was always in bad shape when he got back, and old Doctor Pratt, deaf and half blind though he was, used to warn him about his heart, and about the danger of delirium tremens. Folks could always tell by the shouting and cursing when he was home again.

It was on the ninth of June—on a Wednesday, the day after young Joshua Goodenough finished building his new-fangled silo—that Tom started out on his last and longest spree. He came back the next Tuesday morning, and folks at the store saw him lashing his bay stallion the way he did when whisky had a hold of him. Then there came shouts and shrieks and oaths from the Sprague house, and first thing anybody knew Sophie was running over to old Doctor Pratt's at top speed.

The doctor found Thorndike at Sprague's when he got there, and Tom was on the bed in his room, with eyes staring and foam around his mouth. Old

Pratt fumbled around and gave the usual tests, then shook his head solemnly and told Sophie she had suffered a great bereavement—that her nearest and dearest had passed through the pearly gates to a better land, just as everybody knew he would if he didn't let up on his drinking.

Sophie kind of sniffled, the loungers whisper, but didn't seem to take on much. Thorndike didn't do anything but smile—perhaps at the ironic fact that he, always an enemy, was now the only person who could be of any use to Thomas Sprague. He shouted something in old Doctor Pratt's half-good ear about the need of having the funeral early on account of Tom's condition. Drunks like that were always doubtful subjects, and any extra delay—with merely rural facilities—would entail consequences, visual and otherwise, hardly acceptable to the deceased's loving mourners. The doctor had muttered that Tom's alcoholic career ought to have embalmed him pretty well in advance, but Thorndike assured him to the contrary, at the same time boasting of his own skill, and of the superior methods he had devised through his experiments.

It is here that the whispers of the loungers grow acutely disturbing. Up to this point the story is usually told by Ezra Davenport, or Luther Fry, if Ezra is laid up with chilblains, as he is apt to be in winter; but from now on old Calvin Wheeler takes up the thread, and his voice has a damnably insidious way of suggesting hidden horror. If Johnny Dow happens to be passing by there is always a pause, for Stillwater does not like to have Johnny talk too much with strangers.

CALVIN edges close to the traveler and sometimes seizes a coat-lapel with his gnarled, mottled hand while he half shuts his watery blue eyes.

"Well, sir," he whispers, "Henry he went home an' got his undertaker's fixin's—crazy Johnny Dow lugged most of 'em, for he was always doin' chores for Henry—an' says as Doc Pratt an' crazy Johnny should help lay out the body. Doc always did say as how he thought Henry talked too much—a-boastin' what a fine workman he was, an' how lucky it was that Stillwater had a reg'lar undertaker instead of buryin' folks jest as they was, like they do over to Whitby.

" 'Suppose,' says he, 'some fellow was to be took with some of them paralyzin' cramps like you read about. How'd a body like it when they lowered him down and begun shovelin' the dirt back? How'd he like it when he was chokin' down there under the new headstone, scratchin' an' tearin' if he chanced to get back the power, but all the time knowin' it wasn't no use? No, sir, I tell you it's a blessin' Stillwater's got a smart doctor as knows when a man's dead and when he ain't, and a trained undertaker who can fix a corpse so he'll stay put without no trouble.'

"That was the way Henry went on talkin', most like he was talkin' to poor Tom's remains; and old Doc Pratt he didn't like what he was able to catch of it, even though Henry did call him a smart doctor. Crazy Johnny kept watchin' of the corpse, and it didn't make it none too pleasant the way he'd slobber about things like, 'He ain't cold, Doc,' or 'I see his eyelids move,' or 'There's a hole in his arm jest like the ones I git when Henry gives me a syringe full of what makes me feel good.' Thorndike shut him up on that, though we all knowed he'd been givin' poor Johnny drugs. It's a wonder the poor fellow ever got clear of the habit.

"But the worst thing, accordin' to the doctor, was the way the body jerked up when Henry begun to shoot it full of em-

balmin'-fluid. He'd been boastin' about what a fine new formula he'd got practisin' on cats and dogs, when all of a sudden Tom's corpse began to double up like it was alive and fixin' to wrassle. Land of Goshen, but Doc says he was scared stiff, though he knowed the way corpses act when the muscles begin to stiffen. Well, sir, the long and short of it is, that the corpse sat up an' grabbed a holt of Thorndike's syringe so that it got stuck in Henry hisself, an' give him as neat a dose of his own embalmin'-fluid as you'd wish to see. That got Henry pretty scared, though he yanked the point out and managed to get the body down again and shot full of the fluid. He kept measurin' more of the stuff out as though he wanted to be sure there was enough, and kept reassurin' himself as not much had got into him, but crazy Johnny begun singin' out, 'That's what you give Lige Hopkins's dog when it got all dead an' stiff an' then waked up agin. Now you're a-goin' to get dead an' stiff like Tom Sprague be! Remember it don't set to work till after a long spell if you don't get much.'

"Sophie, she was downstairs with some of the neighbors—my wife Matildy, she that's dead an' gone this thirty year, was one of them. They were all tryin' to find out whether Thorndike was over when Tom came home, and whether findin' him there was what set poor Tom off. I may as well say as some folks thought it mighty funny that Sophie didn't carry on more, nor mind the way Thorndike had smiled. Not as anybody was hintin' that Henry helped Tom off with some of his queer cooked-up fluids and syringes, or that Sophie would keep still if she thought so—but you know how folks will guess behind a body's back. We all knowed the nigh crazy way Thorndike had hated Tom—not without reason, at that—and Emily Barbour says to my Matildy as how Henry was lucky to have ol' Doc Pratt right on the spot with a death certificate as didn't leave no doubt for nobody."

When old Calvin gets to this point he usually begins to mumble indistinguishably in his straggling, dirty white beard. Most listeners try to edge away from him, and he seldom appears to heed the gesture. It is generally Fred Peck, who was a very small boy at the time of the events, who continues the tale.

Thomas Sprague's funeral was held on Thursday, June seventeenth, only two days after his death. Such haste was thought almost indecent in remote and inaccessible Stillwater, where long distances had to be covered by those who came, but Thorndike had insisted that the peculiar condition of the deceased demanded it. The undertaker had seemed rather nervous since preparing the body, and could be seen frequently feeling his pulse. Old Doctor Pratt thought he must be worrying about the accidental dose of embalming-fluid. Naturally, the story of the "laying out" had spread, so that a double zest animated the mourners who assembled to glut their curiosity and morbid interest.

Thorndike, though he was obviously upset, seemed intent on doing his professional duty in magnificent style. Sophie and others who saw the body were most startled by its utter lifelikeness, and the mortuary virtuoso made doubly sure of his job by repeating certain injections at stated intervals. He almost wrung a sort of reluctant admiration from the townfolk and visitors, though he tended to spoil that impression by his boastful and tasteless talk. Whenever he administered to his silent charge he would repeat that eternal rambling about the good luck of having a first-class undertaker. What—he would say as if directly addressing the body—if Tom had had one of those care-

less fellows who bury their subjects alive? The way he harped on the horrors of premature burial was truly barbarous and sickening.

SERVICES were held in the stuffy best room—opened for the first time since Mrs. Sprague died. The tuneless little parlor organ groaned disconsolately, and the coffin, supported on trestles near the hall door, was covered with sickly-smelling flowers. It was obvious that a record-breaking crowd was assembling from far and near, and Sophie endeavored to look properly grief-stricken for their benefit. At unguarded moments she seemed both puzzled and uneasy, dividing her scrutiny between the feverish-looking undertaker and the life-like body of her brother. A slow disgust at Thorndike seemed to be brewing within her, and neighbors whispered freely that she would soon send him about his business now that Tom was out of the way—that is, if she could, for such a slick customer was sometimes hard to deal with. But with her money and remaining looks she might be able to get another fellow, and he'd probably take care of Henry well enough.

As the organ wheezed into *Beautiful Isle of Somewhere* the Methodist church choir added their lugubrious voices to the gruesome cacophony, and everyone looked piously at Deacon Leavitt—everyone, that is, except crazy Johnny Dow, who kept his eyes glued to the still form beneath the glass of the coffin. He was muttering softly to himself.

Stephen Barbour—from the next farm—was the only one who noticed Johnny. He shivered as he saw that the idiot was talking directly to the corpse, and even making foolish signs with his fingers as if to taunt the sleeper beneath the plate glass. Tom, he reflected, had kicked poor Johnny around on more than one occasion, though probably not without provocation. Something about this whole event was getting on Stephen's nerves. There was a suppressed tension and brooding abnormality in the air for which he could not account. Johnny ought not to have been allowed in the house—and it was curious what an effort Thorndike seemed to be making to look at the body. Every now and then the undertaker would feel his pulse with an odd air.

The Reverend Silas Atwood droned on in a plaintive monotone about the deceased—about the striking of Death's sword in the midst of this little family, breaking the earthly tie between this loving brother and sister. Several of the neighbors looked furtively at one another from beneath lowered eyelids, while Sophie actually began to sob nervously. Thorndike moved to her side and tried to reassure her, but she seemed to shrink curiously away from him. His motions were distinctly uneasy, and he seemed to feel acutely the abnormal tension permeating the air. Finally, conscious of his duty as master of ceremonies, he stepped forward and announced in a sepulchral voice that the body might be viewed for the last time.

Slowly the friends and neighbors filed past the bier, from which Thorndike roughly dragged crazy Johnny away. Tom seemed to be resting peacefully. That devil had been handsome in his day. A few genuine sobs—and many feigned ones—were heard, though most of the crowd were content to stare curiously and whisper afterward. Steve Barbour lingered long and attentively over the still face, and moved away shaking his head. His wife, Emily, following after him, whispered that Henry Thorndike had better not boast so much about his work, for Tom's eyes had come open. They had been shut when the services began, for she had been up and looked. But they

certainly looked natural—not the way one would expect after two days.

When Fred Peck gets this far he usually pauses as if he did not like to continue. The listener, too, tends to feel that something unpleasant is ahead. But Peck reassures his audience with the statement that what happened isn't as bad as folks like to hint. Even Steve never put into words what he may have thought, and crazy Johnny, of course, can't be counted at all.

It was Luella Morse—the nervous old maid who sang in the choir—who seems to have touched things off. She was filing past the coffin like the rest, but stopped to peer a little closer than anyone else except the Barbours had peered. And then, without warning, she gave a shrill scream and fell in a dead faint.

Naturally, the room was at once a chaos of confusion. Old Doctor Pratt elbowed his way to Luella and called for some water to throw in her face, and others surged up to look at her and at the coffin. Johnny Dow began chanting to himself, "He knows, he knows, he kin hear all we're a-sayin' and see all we're a-doin', and they'll bury him that way"—but no one stopped to decipher his mumbling except Steve Barbour.

In a very few moments Luella began to come out of her faint, and could not tell exactly what had startled her. All she could whisper was, "The way he looked—the way he looked." But to other eyes the body seemed exactly the same. It was a gruesome sight, though, with those open eyes and that high coloring.

And then the bewildered crowd noticed something which put both Luella and the body out of their minds for a moment. It was Thorndike—on whom the sudden excitement and jostling crowd seemed to be having a curiously bad effect. He had evidently been knocked down in the general bustle, and was on the floor trying to drag himself to a sitting posture. The expression on his face was terrifying in the extreme, and his eyes were beginning to take on a glazed, fishy expression. He could scarcely speak aloud, but the husky rattle of his throat held an ineffable desperation which was obvious to all.

"Get me home, quick, and let me be. That fluid I got in my arm by mistake . . . heart action . . . this damned excitement . . . too much . . . wait . . . wait . . . don't think I'm dead if I seem to . . . only the fluid—just get me home and wait . . . I'll come to later, don't know how long . . . all the time I'll be conscious and know what's going on . . . don't be deceived. . . ."

As his words trailed off into nothingness old Doctor Pratt reached him and felt his pulse—watching a long time and finally shaking his head. "No use doing anything—he's gone. Heart no good—and that fluid he got in his arm must have been bad stuff. I don't know what it is."

A kind of numbness seemed to fall on all the company. New death in the chamber of death! Only Steve Barbour thought to bring up Thorndike's last choking words. Was he surely dead, when he himself had said he might falsely seem so? Wouldn't it be better to wait awhile and see what would happen? And for that matter, what harm would it do if Doc Pratt were to give Tom Sprague another looking over before burial?

Crazy Johnny was moaning, and had flung himself on Thorndike's body like a faithful dog. "Don't ye bury him, don't ye bury him! He ain't dead no more nor Lige Hopkins's dog nor Deacon Leavitt's calf was when he shot 'em full. He's got some stuff he puts into ye to make ye seem like dead when ye ain't! Ye seem like dead but ye know everything what's a-goin' on, and the next day ye come to

as good as ever. Don't ye bury him—he'll come to under the earth an' he can't scratch up! He's a good man, an' not like Tom Sprague. Hope to Gawd Tom scratches an' chokes for hours an' hours. . . ."

But no one save Barbour was paying any attention to poor Johnny. Indeed, what Steve himself had said had evidently fallen on deaf ears. Uncertainty was everywhere. Old Doc Pratt was applying final tests and mumbling about death certificate blanks, and unctuous Elder Atwood was suggesting that something be done about a double interment. With Thorndike dead there was no undertaker this side of Rutland, and it would mean a terrible expense if one were to be brought from there, and if Thorndike were not embalmed in this hot June weather—well, one couldn't tell. And there were no relatives or friends to be too critical unless Sophie chose to be—but Sophie was on the other side of the room, staring silently, fixedly and almost morbidly into her brother's coffin.

Deacon Leavitt tried to restore a semblance of decorum, and had poor Thorndike carried across the hall to the sitting-room, meanwhile sending Zenas Wells and Walter Perkins over to the undertaker's house for a coffin of the right size. The key was in Henry's trousers pocket. Johnny continued to whine and paw at the body, and Elder Atwood busied himself with inquiring about Thorndike's denomination — for Henry had not attended local services. When it was decided that his folks in Rutland—all dead now—had been Baptists, the Reverend Silas decided that Deacon Leavitt had better offer the brief prayer.

It was a gala day for the funeral-fanciers of Stillwater and vicinity. Even Luella had recovered enough to stay. Gossip, murmured and whispered, buzzed busily while a few composing touches were given to Thorndike's cooling, stiffening form. Johnny had been cuffed out of the house, as most agreed he should have been in the first place, but his distant howls were now and then wafted gruesomely in.

When the body was encoffined and laid out beside that of Thomas Sprague, the silent, almost frightening-looking Sophie gazed intently at it as she had gazed at her brother's. She had not uttered a word for a dangerously long time, and the mixed expression on her face was past all describing or interpreting. As the others withdrew to leave her alone with the dead she managed to find a sort of mechanical speech, but no one could make out the words, and she seemed to be talking first to one body and then the other.

And now, with what would seem to an outsider the acme of gruesome unconscious comedy, the whole funeral mummery of the afternoon was listlessly repeated. Again the organ wheezed, again the choir screeched and scraped, again a droning incantation arose, and again the morbidly curious spectators filed past a macabre object—this time a dual array of mortuary repose. Some of the more sensitive people shivered at the whole proceeding, and again Stephen Barbour felt an underlying note of eldritch horror and demoniac abnormality. God, how life-like both of those corpses were . . . and how in earnest poor Thorndike had been about not wanting to be judged dead . . . and how he had hated Tom Sprague . . . but what could one do in the face of common sense—a dead man was a dead man, and there was old Doc Pratt with his years of experience . . . if nobody else bothered, why should one bother oneself? . . . Whatever Tom had

got he had probably deserved . . . and if Henry had done anything to him, the score was even now . . . well, Sophie was free at last. . . .

As the peering procession moved at last toward the hall and the outer door, Sophie was alone with the dead once more. Elder Atwood was out in the road talking to the hearse-driver from Lee's livery stable, and Deacon Leavitt was arranging for a double quota of pall-bearers. Luckily the hearse would hold two coffins. No hurry—Ed Plummer and Ethan Stone were going ahead with shovels to dig the second grave. There would be three livery hacks and any number of private rigs in the cavalcade—no use trying to keep the crowd away from the graves.

Then came that frantic scream from the parlor where Sophie and the bodies were. Its suddenness almost paralyzed the crowd and brought back the same sensation which had surged up when Luella had screamed and fainted. Steve Barbour and Deacon Leavitt started to go in, but before they could enter the house Sophie was bursting forth, sobbing and gasping about "That face at the window! . . . that face at the window! . . ."

At the same time a wild-eyed figure rounded the corner of the house, removing all mystery from Sophie's dramatic cry. It was, very obviously, the face's owner—poor crazy Johnny, who began to leap up and down, pointing at Sophie and shrieking, "She knows! She knows! I seen it in her face when she looked at 'em and talked to 'em! She knows, and she's a-lettin' 'em go down in the earth to scratch an' claw for air. . . . But they'll talk to her so's she kin hear 'em . . . they'll talk to her, an' appear to her . . . and some day they'll come back an' git her!"

Zenas Wells dragged the shrieking half-wit to a woodshed behind the house and bolted him in as best he could. His screams and poundings could be heard at a distance, but nobody paid him any further attention. The procession was made up, and with Sophie in the first hack it slowly covered the short distance past the village to the Swamp Hollow burying-ground.

Elder Atwood made appropriate remarks as Thomas Sprague was laid to rest, and by the time he was through, Ed and Ethan had finished Thorndike's grave on the other side of the cemetery—to which the crowd presently shifted. Deacon Leavitt then spoke ornamentally, and the lowering process was repeated. People had begun to drift off in knots, and the clatter of receding buggies and carryalls was quite universal, when the shovels began to fly again. As the earth thudded down on the coffin-lids, Thorndike's first, Steve Barbour noticed the queer expressions flitting over Sophie Sprague's face. He couldn't keep track of them all, but behind the rest there seemed to lurk a sort of wry, perverse, half-suppressed look of vague triumph. He shook his head.

ZENAS had run back and let crazy Johnny out of the woodshed before Sophie got home, and the poor fellow at once made frantically for the graveyard. He arrived before the shovelmen were through, and while many of the curious mourners were still lingering about. What he shouted into Tom Sprague's partly-filled grave, and how he clawed at the loose earth of Thorndike's freshly-finished mound across the cemetery, surviving spectators still shudder to recall. Jotham Blake, the constable, had to take him back to the town farm by force, and his screams waked dreadful echoes.

This is where Fred Peck usually leaves off the story. What more, he asks, is

there to tell? It was a gloomy tragedy, and one can scarcely wonder that Sophie grew queer after that. That is all one hears if the hour is so late that old Calvin Wheeler has tottered home, but when he is still around he breaks in again with that damnably suggestive and insidious whisper. Sometimes those who hear him dread to pass either the shuttered house or the graveyard afterward, especially after dark.

"Heh, heh . . . Fred was only a little shaver then, and don't remember no more than half of what was goin' on! You want to know why Sophie keeps her house shuttered, and why crazy Johnny still keeps a-talkin' to the dead and a-shoutin' at Sophie's windows? Well, sir, I don't know's I know all there is to know, but I hear what I hear."

Here the old man ejects his cud of tobacco and leans forward to buttonhole the listener.

"It was that same night, mind ye—toward mornin', and just eight hours after them burials—when we heard the first scream from Sophie's house. Woke us all up—Steve and Emily Barbour and me and Matildy goes over hot-footin', all in night gear, and finds Sophie all dressed and dead fainted on the settin'-room floor. Lucky she hadn't locked her door. When we got her to she was shakin' like a leaf, and wouldn't let on by so much as a word what was ailin' her. Matildy and Emily done what they could to quiet her down, but Steve whispered things to me as didn't make me none too easy. Come about an hour when we allowed we'd be goin' home soon, that Sophie she begun to tip her head on one side like she was a-listenin' to somethin'. Then on a sudden she screamed again, and keeled over in another faint.

"Well, sir, I'm tellin' what I'm tellin', and won't do no guessin' like Steve Barbour would a done if he dared. He always was the greatest hand for hintin' things . . . died ten year ago of pneumony. . . .

"What we heard so faint-like was just poor crazy Johnny, of course. 'Taint more than a mile to the buryin'-ground, and he must a got out of the window where they'd locked him up at the town farm—even if Constable Blake says he didn't get out that night. From that day to this he hangs around them graves a-talkin' to the both of them—cussin' and kickin' at Tom's mound, and puttin' posies and things on Henry's. And when he ain't a-doin' that he's hangin' around Sophie's shuttered windows howlin' about what's a-comin' some day to git her.

"She wouldn't never go near the buryin'-ground, and now she won't come out of the house at all nor see nobody. Got to sayin' there was a curse on Stillwater—and I'm dinged if she ain't half right, the way things is a-goin' to pieces these days. There certainly was somethin' queer about Sophie right along. Once when Sally Hopkins was a-callin' on her—in '97 or '98, I think it was—there was an awful rattlin' at her winders—and Johnny was safe locked up at the time—at least, so Constable Dodge swore up and down. But I ain't takin' no stock in their stories about noises every seventeenth of June, or about faint shinin' figures a-tryin' Sophie's door and winders every black mornin' about two o'clock.

"You see, it was about two o'clock in the mornin' that Sophie heard the sounds and keeled over twice that first night after the buryin'. Steve and me, and Matildy and Emily, heard the second lot, faint as it was, just like I told you. And I'm a-tellin' of you again as how it must a been crazy Johnny over to the buryin'-ground, let Jotham Blake claim what he will. There ain't no tellin' the sound of

a man's voice so far off, and with our heads full of nonsense it ain't no wonder we thought there was two voices—and voices that hadn't ought to be speakin' at all.

"Steve, he claimed to have heard more than I did. I verily believe he took some stock in ghosts. Matildy and Emily was so scared they didn't remember what they heard. And curious enough, nobody else in town—if anybody was awake at that ungodly hour—never said nothin' about hearin' no sounds at all.

"Whatever it was, was so faint it might have been the wind if there hadn't been words. I made out a few, but don't want to say as I'd back up all Steve claimed to have caught. . . .

" 'She-devil' . . . 'all the time' . . . 'Henry' . . . and 'alive' was plain . . . and so was 'you know' . . . 'said you'd stand by' . . . 'get rid of him' and 'bury me' . . . in a kind of changed voice. . . . Then there was that awful 'comin' again some day'—in a death-like squawk . . . but you can't tell me Johnny couldn't have made those sounds. . . .

"Hey, you! What's takin' you off in such a hurry? Mebbe there's more I could tell you if I had a mind. . . ."

Edgar Allan Poe

By ADOLPHE DE CASTRO

An acrostic sonnet, written in a sequestered Providence churchyard where Poe once walked

Enshrined within our hearts is e'er thy name,
Dear Bard, unjoyed by lasting happiness
Great love doth yield; but through thy pain and stress
A messenger, the ghostly Raven, came,
Revealing horror stark and cold; he bore

A tear that flowed from eyes of lost Lenore,
Light-glinting, and the shade of her caress.
Lo, then, thy genius flamed with art that chills,
A grim, ubiquitous malignity,
Night-gloomed and pulsing with portending ills

Pernicious yet delightful, brought to thee
On angel's wings, a gift that, loved and feared,
Enranked thee greatest monarch of the weird.

Anton's Last Dream

By EDWIN BAIRD

A brief tale of the dismal success of a scientist's experiment

ANYTHING that man can dream, man can do. So believed Anton Slezak, the chemist.

Man had dreamed of flying, Anton would argue, and now he flies across the seven seas. He had dreamed of annihilating distance, and today he sends his voice round the world with the speed of light. He had dreamed of penetrating the mysteries of the universe, and now he sees trillions of miles into space.

So argued Anton, the chemist.

Anton had dreamed many dreams, and some had vanished mistily and some had become reality. But none was too fantastic for Anton's laboratory tests.

Upon the chemist in his laboratory, Anton often said, rested the future development of mankind. And the future, Anton promised, would outshine the present as the present outshines the past.

No poor dreamer was Anton. His dreams had brought him great riches. For he had turned his genius to practical matters, and, working miracles in his laboratory, had discovered ways of converting waste into things of commercial value—cornstalks into cloth, weeds into paper, coal soot into lacquer—and from these and other such discoveries Anton had derived much wealth.

He had bought a magnificent home. He had married a young and lovely woman. He had a nephew who idolized him; and he had many friends and admirers and loyal assistants, and a truly beautiful wife, who, as anybody could plainly see, loved him devotedly. He had, indeed, one might have said, everything worth living for.

And now, at the age of fifty-two, he seemed on the threshold of still greater achievements.

At the moment, however, Anton was employed in developing a dream, the fulfilment of which could have no practical value whatever.

He knew that others had dreamed the same thing. They had put it in motion pictures, in pseudo-scientific writing, in extravagant fiction. But it remained, as yet, merely a dream that nobody would believe.

Anton was determined to make this dream come true.

He brought to bear upon the task all the resources of his scientific mind, all his knowledge of physics and chemistry. He concentrated upon it day and night, experimenting, testing, trying first this, then that, and then discarding everything and starting all over again. He worked in secrecy, in his private laboratory. He told none of his corps of assistants about it; nor his wife; nor his nephew. He wanted nobody to know of this dream—until he was through with it. Then, if he succeeded, the whole world should know about it.

And at last the day came when he knew he *had* succeeded.

He was in his laboratory, that day, when his young and beautiful wife entered. She was an exquisite creature, vibrant with youth, aglow with health, athrob with the joy and zest of life.

"Anton," she said, "you ought to get

outdoors for a change of air. You've locked yourself in here for weeks, and you're looking ghastly." She anxiously regarded his scholarly face. Against his black Vandyke beard, has skin was startlingly pale. Yet his eyes glowed with intellectual fire.

"I know, my dear," he said, patting her shoulder; "but I've nearly finished now, and presently we shall celebrate—you and Robin and I—the triumph of my greatest experiment."

Her long blue eyes surveyed the litter of test-tubes and retorts.

"What is this experiment, Anton?"

"You will soon know, my dear. And it will astonish you. I promise you that. Now run along, like a good little girl, and enjoy yourself." His tone was paternal, and as they stood together they might well have been mistaken for father and daughter—he, tall and dark and somehow elderly; she, small and blond and gloriously youthful.

"I wish, Anton," she protested, "you wouldn't always treat me like a child. After all, you know, I *am* your wife. . . . And I am proud of you, Anton. I like to be seen with you, and watch people point you out as a great celebrity, and let them know that you're my husband. So suppose you drop everything for this afternoon and go places with me. We could drive through the park, stop somewhere for a cocktail, go somewhere else for dinner, and then to a theater if you like, or to a night club . . ."

"No, my dear. But you and Robin go."

She moved a disdainful shoulder. "Robin! It's only a bore, going places with Robin. He's such a——"

She bit her lips, for at this moment Robin entered—an athletic young chap of sparkling eye, of sun-tanned skin and exuberant spirits.

"'Lo, Uncle Anton! How comes the Great Experiment?"

"Most satisfactorily, my boy. It will soon be finished, and it will amaze you and Zora—and all the world."

"Well, Anton," said Zora, "if I can't coax you outdoors, I'll be running along. I've some letters to write."

"Wait, my dear."

She paused at the door, her hand on the knob, and looked back at him. She ignored the younger man as she might have ignored a small boy.

"Since you and Robin are to share in the success of my experiment"—Anton beamed upon them—"it is only fitting that you should also share in its consummation."

He walked to a cabinet, from which he took two pairs of white gauntlets.

"First," he said, "you must put these on. . . . And now," he added, when their hands were gloved, "take this material and dip it in here."

From a shelf of the cabinet he had taken a large roll of white cloth, wrapped in cellophane, and from a white-enameled vat he removed the lid, disclosing a milky fluid.

He stood between them at the round vessel, giving instructions, while they immersed the cloth in the chalky liquid—"Be careful," he warned, "not to let it touch your clothing"—and, with his pointed black beard and in his long white apron, he might have been some high priest standing beside a cauldron, instructing novices in a pagan ceremony.

"That will do," he said, and covered the vat. "Now, your gloves."

He removed their gauntlets and cast them into a metal container.

"And is that all there is to it?" asked Zora.

"That is all, my dear—until the three of us meet again. Then we shall commemorate what I am sure you will agree is the most astounding discovery in the history of chemistry."

"Meanwhile," she said, "I'll get at my letter-writing."

She kissed him fondly, spoke to the young man—in the condescending tone of one addressing a small child—and left the laboratory.

As the door closed behind her, Anton turned to his nephew. A sudden change had come over him.

"My boy," he said gravely, "there is something I must speak to you about." He paused, passing his long fingers across his wide brow, as if uncertain how to continue. "I wish, Robin," he said finally, in a hesitant voice, "you would try to be a little more considerate of Zora. You scarcely speak to her."

The young man flushed beneath his tan. "But, Uncle Anton! I *do* try to be considerate of her. And you see how she treats me. As if I were a school kid! . . . But she adores *you*, Uncle Anton. She thinks you're the greatest man in the world."

"Does she, indeed?" murmured Anton, and a soft light shone in his deep-set eyes. "Well, it's pleasant to hear that."

"And now, Uncle Anton—if you don't mind—I think I'll run out to the Broadmoor Club and play a set or two of tennis."

"Run right along, my boy—and play a set or two for me."

Anton closed the door behind him, and locked and bolted it. Then he walked to the vat and lifted the cover.

The entire contents of the vat had vanished!

He gazed into the empty vessel, his fingers caressing his pointed beard, his eyes glowing with satisfaction.

And now he did a number of strange things. First, he went to an alcove and wheeled out a full-length, triple mirror, which he adjusted in the center of the room. Then he removed all his clothing. And then he walked to the vat and began a weird pantomime. He reached inside as if drawing forth various garments, and, standing before the triple mirror, he went through the motions of putting them on. And as he made these motions he gradually disappeared: first, his legs; then his feet; then the upper part of his body, and finally, as he seemed to pull an elastic cap over his head and ears, only his hands and face were visible; and these had the eery appearance of floating in space.

Presently these, too, vanished as he brought forth a bowl of the milky fluid and bathed his face and hands in it, and soaked his eye-glasses and put them on.

With that, *Anton Slezak became completely invisible!*

His experiment was a success. His dream had come true. He had proved his belief that there are certain colors, or combinations of colors, that are invisible to human eyes; and he had also proved that by juggling and interchanging the molecules of certain dyes he could produce this invisible coloring.

Careful to make no sound, he unlatched the door and walked through the outer laboratory, where his assistants were employed. He tested his invisibility on them—though he knew it needed no testing—and passed on to the street and started briskly downtown.

Anton might have called upon his friends and, like a disembodied spirit, joined in their conversation and created who knows what havoc among them. But

he did not visit the haunts of his friends. He visited the city's largest hotel.

Here, again, he might have been an unseen spectator of loves and hates, and intrigues and jealousies and exotic adventures—rich human drama on a cosmopolitan stage—had he so desired. But Anton had no such desire.

He threaded his way through the hotel lobby, weaving in and out through the crowd, and went to one of the tower elevators and thence to the forty-ninth floor. The elevator boy, answering a signal, opened the door, and Anton slipped ghostily out.

DOWN the hall he went, straight to Room 4901. He knocked on the door. A peculiar knock: two taps, a pause, then three taps.

And almost instantly the door was opened.

It was opened by his nephew, Robin.

As Robin opened the door, his young face was alight with an eager expression—an expression that quickly changed to one of blank surprize. Puzzled, he stepped outside the door and looked up and down the corridor. And, since he left the door standing open, Anton crossed the threshold and walked inside the room. He moved to a corner near a deep-cushioned couch and stood there watching Robin.

He watched him step back inside and close the door and look nervously about the room, his handsome features half comical with perplexity.

Then he heard another knock at the door. It was the same knock that he had given: two taps, pause, three taps.

He saw Robin open the door again and heard his low joyous cry: *"Sweetheart!"*

And then Anton saw his young and beautiful wife.

He saw her in Robin's arms. He saw her arms around Robin. And he saw their lips and bodies meet and cling in rapturous embrace.

Robin had closed and locked the door when she entered, and they stood there, now, for a long minute, kissing each other passionately.

"Well, *darling!*" she breathed.

"A queer thing just happened, sweetheart—just before you came. Rather uncanny, too. I heard somebody knock, and when I opened the door nobody was there."

She removed her hat and fluffed her pale-gold hair. "Somebody had the wrong door, of course. Kiss me again, darling."

He kissed her again. "But it was *your* knock, dearest."

"Pure coincidence, my lamb." She tossed the hat on a table.

"And not only that," said Robin, "but while I stood there, with the door open, I thought I heard, or felt, somebody move past me. It was like a ghost."

She laughed throatily. "You *are* getting jittery, aren't you, darling?"

"Just the same," he persisted, "I still have the feeling that somebody came inside this room."

She looked about her happily, her long blue eyes humid with love. "Well, there's nobody here now, my precious—nobody except you and me. And that's all that matters—ever!"

She slipped his arm around her supple young body, and together they moved toward the couch.

And as Anton watched them sink down upon it—and also sink, in mad abandon, into the purple abyss of passion—there visited his deep-set eyes the same soft expression they had known a while ago,

when Robin had said to him: "But she adores *you*, Uncle Anton."

He heard her say now, a disturbing note in her throaty voice:

"Oh, Robin, I love you so! So much, my darling, it almost frightens me!"

"It frightens me, too, sometimes," said Robin, "when I think what might happen if Uncle Anton — d'you know, Zora, I sometimes wonder if he doesn't suspect . . ."

She smiled dreamily into his eyes and kissed him lingeringly on the lips. "You funny boy! Why, he even thinks we hate each other!"

Robin also smiled, somewhat quizzically. "Only this afternoon he told me to be more considerate of you! . . . But seriously, Zora, we can't go on this way indefinitely. He'll *have* to know, sometime. We—you'll have to get a divorce, or—or something."

She closed his mouth with her kisses. For a space he was silent.

Then: "I wonder what this new experiment of his is."

"I don't care what it is," breathed Zora, her arms around his neck. "All I care about, darling, is you."

"This afternoon," Robin went on, "he seemed to imply——"

"That all three of us," smiled Zora, "might celebrate tonight."

And now Anton stood before them. He spoke purringly.

"And so we shall, my dear," he said.

Had the hotel walls caved in, the two lovers could have suffered no greater consternation. They sprang to their feet. They looked wildly about. They stared at each other in bewilderment.

And all the while, Anton's voice purred softly on from his invisibility:

"It is no use, my dear. You cannot see me. Nor will you ever see me again. Nor you, either, Robin, my boy. The experiment was a perfect success. Did I not say it would astound you?"

FRANTIC with fear—fear of they knew not what—both rushed for the door. But Anton got there first.

And now they saw, suspended in mid-air, a revolver menacing them.

Robin lunged for it desperately—but too late. The revolver spoke, once, and he sank to the floor. Zora screamed, her eyes widening with horror upon his twitching body. She clutched at her throat. She screamed again, insanely, and reached out for the door. Then the revolver spoke a second time, and she collapsed beside her lover.

Anton knelt beside them and watched them die. They were an unconscionably long time about it, he thought.

The telephone began ringing. That would be the management. Somebody, of course, had heard the shots and Zora's piercing screams.

Anton, still kneeling beside their bodies, watched their blood flow together and stain the rug with a grotesque pattern.

The telephone continued to ring. Suddenly there came a sharp knock at the door. That would be the house detective.

Anton made sure they were both quite dead; and then he rose and crossed the room and sat down upon the couch.

He had one shot left in his revolver. And—just as the door burst violently open—he sent it neatly through his heart.

Vallisneria Madness

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

A strange and curious little story, about the moonlight mating of flowers

SEATED comfortably on the broad terrace of Professor Gordon's palatial mansion, Tom Spencer stared abstractedly at the red disk of the setting sun, reflected in the turgid waters of the pool in the garden beyond the edge of the terrace as he listened to his host recount the fascinating story of the love-life of the vallisneria.

The cameo-face of the white-haired botany professor bore a whimsical expression as he declaimed, "Beneath the black surface of that muddy pool out there, the flowers of a score or so of this rare plant which I brought from tropical Asia, pass their entire humdrum life, except for one brief night of moonlit love—not unlike our human existence."

Tom Spencer shifted his keen gray eyes to stare at the matted, ribbon-like leaves, floating on top of the water, which gave little indication of floral life below.

The old professor continued, "As you know from my lectures at Columbia, the vallisneria is a diœcious plant. On one night of each year, the night of the vernal full moon, the stem of each female flower begins to stretch, until its ghostly green and white bloom rises to the surface. Each male flower too feels that same impelling urge, 'an instinct within it that reaches and towers,' as James Russell Lowell says. Listen to how Maeterlinck, that great poet and scientist, describes their fatal wooing."

He opened a book which lay on his lap, tilted it so that its pages were illumined by the fading sunlight, and read aloud:

"The green-coated male flowers rise in turn, full of hope, toward the flowers which already sway above them in the moonlight, awaiting them and summoning them to the magic world which lies beyond their native obscurity. But, when half their upward journey is done, they reach the limit that their too short stems can stretch, and are checked abruptly, before they can win their way to their indifferent sweethearts, who pridefully refuse to bend to caress them.

"Filled with yearning, the little heart of each male flower swells and swells until it breaks. In a magnificent effort to achieve his bliss, he tears himself from his stem, and in one incomparable flight rises to perish in love on the surface of the pool. Dying, but free and radiant, he floats for one brief ecstatic moment beside his beloved, then shrivels and floats away; while his mate closes the petals in which she has imprisoned his last breath of life, and shrinks back into the depths, there to ripen the fruit of that fatal union."

The sun set, as Professor Gordon closed his copy of Maeterlinck. A twilight mist began to form above the surface of the garden pool. "How much more noble are the flowers than we," he mused. "As Shakespeare says, 'Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.' "

His athletic young guest narrowed his gray eyes and stared inwardly at the vision conjured up by the older man's reading. "I wonder," he breathed.

Professor Gordon broke the spell by saying in a matter-of-fact tone, "Well, my boy, you are to see tonight the mating of vallisneria, a sight which my colleagues would give their eye-teeth to witness."

"I feel flattered——" Spencer began diffidently, shifting his broad shoulders in an embarrassed manner.

But the fine-featured old man silenced

him with a deprecatory, "Don't, then! You are more outstanding as a football player than as a student of botany. I invited you for other reasons than any outstanding ability you may have shown in your four years of studies under me."

(Spencer thought, "Most likely to rub in on his colleagues his non-invitation of them, by asking instead a mere athlete, who is taking botany merely because it's a cinch course.")

Meanwhile the professor was continuing, "I am sorry that I can't stay out here with you. The mists affect my throat. And I'm sorry my daughter Natalie isn't here either. She helps me take care of the plants, and you'd find her quite intelligent about them. But she had to go over to her aunt's."

"I shouldn't think she'd care to miss——"

"Oh, it's an old story with Natalie. She's seen the phenomenon before. And now I must caution you about one thing. Don't go any nearer the pool than the edge of the terrace. The flowers, when in bloom, exude a strong narcotic fragrance, which is rather dangerous. Anyhow, you can see quite clearly from here."

He rose, and held out one slender blue-veined hand.

"Good night, sir," said Spencer, taking the frail hand in his big strong one. "And thank you for inviting me."

TOM SPENCER eased his athletic frame down into one of the terrace chairs, and gazed abstractedly at the purpling pink of the western sky.

"Just as well that that brat of his isn't here tonight," he mused. "What on earth could I do to amuse her?" He remembered having seen Natalie Gordon several times during his Freshman year, hanging around the door of the Botany Building at Morningside Heights, waiting for her father. A gawky, pug-nosed, freckle-faced, little thing, with two tightly braided pigtails—about fourteen or fifteen years old, so he judged. Just as well the brat wasn't here.

Spencer turned his attention back to the garden pool. But pitch-darkness had now fallen, and he could see nothing except the outline of the shrubs against the deep purple of the western sky. Then trees in the distance became dimly lit by the full moon, which was rising behind the house; but the long shadow of the house still obscured the garden and its pool. A vagrant zephyr wafted a damp, muddy scent of mist up from the hidden pool.

"I wonder if those water-plants have any consciousness, any volition, about their tragic mating," mused Spencer, "or is it all merely automatic, mechanistic?"

He leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and visualized the passage from Maeterlinck, which the old botany professor had read to him.

HE OPENED his eyes again with a start, and sat erect. The shadow of the house had receded to the edge of the terrace, and the entire garden, with the pool in its midst, was now bathed in the chalky light of the moon almost overhead.

Above the surface of the water hung a cottony swirling mist, which seemed to portend some sort of boiling activity in the depths of the muddy pool. The mist thickened and spilled out onto the surrounding garden.

"Humph!" sniffed Spencer, getting up out of his chair. "Can't see a thing from here." And, forgetful of Professor Gordon's express injunction, he ambled down off the terrace, and along the garden walk to the edge of the pool.

Through gaps in the swirling mist, he could see the matted ribbon-like vegetation floating inertly in the water. Not a sign of a flower. So he swung back to the terrace, and slumped down again in his chair.

The mist continued to thicken.

"I guess there'll be no show tonight," Spencer grumbled disgustedly. Then suddenly he sat erect, thrust his broad shoulders forward, and peered intently through the gathering fog, where dark shapes—human-like shapes—seemed to be moving.

Brushing the mist away, shedding it, rising above it, and yet still seeming to be a part of it, they stood out at last, clear in the moonlight; majestic women, Valkyries, with proudly-held blond heads, and flashing eyes. Filmy, floating, luna-green robes set off the chalky whiteness of their perfect features.

A heady perfume wafted across from the hidden pool.

The mist receded until it concealed merely the feet of the beautiful creatures. Where they stood, whether on the surface of the pool or on its banks, Spencer could not tell. Swaying slightly, as though rooted, they undulated their green-swathed arms like seaweed in the tide. Their heads thrown back with an almost defiant gesture, they bathed their perfect features in the glaring white light of the zenith moon.

Never had Tom Spencer seen such sheer feminine beauty. He had no recollection of leaving his seat, but now he found himself standing at the edge of the terrace, irresistibly drawn by a strange yearning toward that galaxy of pulchritude. There were some twenty or so of the young women, their faces all different, each a face of character and personality, each more beautiful than the last.

Irresolute, Spencer held out his arms toward the entire group. Which—which one drew him? To which one should he drift? The uncertainty held him back—that, and the subconscious memory of some warning, some prohibition—and some third as yet undefined prompting.

And, while he hesitated, there appeared, poking up through the mist at the feet of the strange regal women, the points of a score of green-peaked hats. Up they came, and faces appeared beneath them, dark, cleanly-cut, handsome faces of men; tense, yearning faces, with flashing, fanatic eyes, each pair of eyes fixed on one of the beautiful women who towered above.

Gradually they rose, until each man, clad in dark Lincoln green, stood beside one of the pale, diaphanous women.

And then a strange, inexplicable paradox! The beautiful women were slender, completely feminine, utterly adorable. The men were well-built, athletic, thoroughly masculine, seemingly tall rather than short. And yet the women towered above them.

Tom Spencer's mind flashed incongruously back to the scrapbooks of his childhood days, in which he had frequently pasted figures from pictures taken in different scales, with the result that each figure, properly proportioned by itself, failed to match the others in size.

Each of the men now clasped his arms around the waist of his beloved, and stretched and stretched, every sinew of his athletic body taut with the effort. Although Spencer could not see their feet for the mist which covered them, he knew that they were standing on tiptoe. An inarticulate sigh went up from all of them. "Kiss me! Kiss me!" it pleaded. "Kiss me, though I die!"

But the stately women stiffened, and

held themselves more aloof, and towered even more inaccessibly, with a beauty so flaming that it hurt. Then their sea-swaying arms floated down until their slim white hands rested on the shoulders of the men. The pearly faces of the women inclined slightly—not enough to meet the upward-straining lips of their mates, but just enough so that they could gaze coldly but enticingly down. A silvery ripple of sound floated through the moonlight. The women were speaking, but what they were saying Spencer could not tell.

A strangled flush spread over the faces of the men, as, lifted by the hands of the women, they rose slowly, until white now with a livid whiteness, their lips met in one passionate, soul-searing embrace.

Tom Spencer drew in a deep breath, and his fingers clenched, then sprang open with a sudden gesture of horror, as he realized that those male heads, so tightly clinging lip to lip with the beautiful mist-women, were bodiless! The green-clad bodies, which had strained so tautly to thrust their heads up to that kiss of death, were now slowly slumping, settling downward, shriveling, turning brown, drifting away in the swirling mists which bathed the feet of the majestic women.

The heads themselves had lost their realness. The skin had become wrinkled, leathery, deflated, flabby. The features were scarcely distinguishable.

Then one by one, with a contemptuous gesture of satiation, the women flung away the sucked-dry rinds. And Tom Spencer, his gaze intent upon the expressions on the women's faces, took no heed what became of the cast-off rinds.

For a subtle change was taking place in those beautiful but cruel creatures. A certain matronly smugness coarsened their features, and they seemed less tall. Yes, they were visibly shrinking, shrinking and becoming squat and ugly, shrinking back into the mists which masked the muddy pool. All, all returning to the slime which had spawned them.

All but one! Alone she stood, unmated, still towering slim and beautiful in the moonlight. And then Tom Spencer knew why he had waited, why he had not gone to any of the others. For, transcendently beautiful though they had all been, yet this sole survivor of that glorious company outshone them all.

Erect she stood, her golden head thrown back, her arms stretched to each side and raised a little, so that the filmy pale green gauze of her gown hung from them like the wings of a luna moth.

SPENCER gasped and rose from his chair. Forgotten were the warnings of Professor Gordon, as the young man moved steadily out off the terrace into the misty moonlight.

Her lips parted, a smile of welcome overspread her cameo face, and then she spoke—a tinkly, silver, moonlit, rippling voice. "Have you been waiting long for me?"

"All my life!" breathed Spencer.

She laughed, a friendly, silvery laugh.

Like a sleep-walker, Spencer continued to plod toward her.

Six-feet one he was, a gridiron star, and yet this frail, slim wisp of a feminine creature towered inaccessibly above him in the mists of the pool.

Spencer reached her. He clasped his arms around her waist, and stretched and stretched, every sinew of his athletic body taut with the effort. He raised his heels from the ground, and strained on tiptoe. A sigh breathed upward from his lips.

"Kiss me! Kiss me!" he pleaded. "Kiss me, though I die."

But she stiffened, and held herself more aloof, and towered even more inaccessibly, while her beauty flamed out so intensely that it gripped Spencer's heart with a stabbing pain.

Then her wide-spread arms floated down, until her slim, cool, white hands rested on Spencer's shoulders. Her cameo-cut face inclined slightly, not enough to meet the upward-straining lips of the young man, but merely enough so that she could gaze coldly but enticingly down into his eyes.

Like a drowning man, there swept through his mind the vision of heads wrenched from male shoulders, sucked dry, and cast aside; male bodies shriveling and drifting away. Well, it was worth it, for that one moment of transcendent ecstasy. But, at the memory-picture of the transformation wrought in the beautiful mist-woman by that long, passionate embrace, he shuddered momentarily. However, he would be gone then—he would not be there to see it. Once more he strained to reach his beloved.

But the expected strangling wrench on his neck did not come. Instead the stiff aloofness of the beautiful girl softened. An expression of yielding consecration suffused her lovely face. She leaned, she bent over him, and floated down into his arms.

Their lips met and clung.

A BREEZE whipped her moon-green gown about him. Opening his eyes, he saw the mists blown away from the stone bench on which she had been standing, by the edge of the garden pool.

Now, nestled in his arms, she no longer seemed terrifyingly dominating and aloof, but instead small and sweet and soft. And she did not coarsen and sink back into the slime of the pool.

Side by side they sat down together on the stone bench, his arm about her slender waist, her golden head against his shoulder.

For a long time they sat thus in silence. Then, "Tom," she breathed.

"You know my name?" he asked in surprize.

"Why not?" she laughed a silvery moonlit laugh.

Again they sat in silence.

At last she pushed softly away from him. "Well, dear," she said, "it is very late, and we really ought to be going in."

"In? Into the pool?"

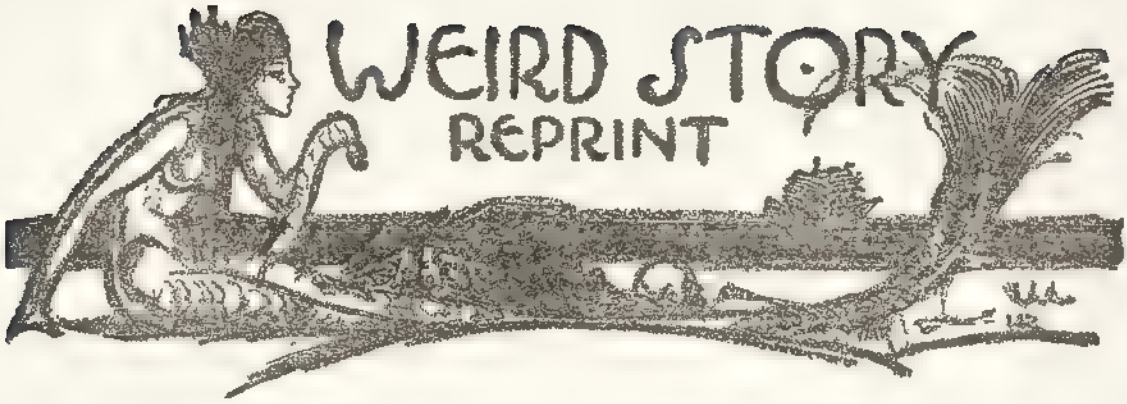
"No, silly! Into the house."

He turned, and seized her by the shoulders, and stared fixedly down at her in the moonlight. Then, with a sigh of gladness, he clasped her to him.

"You're Natalie Gordon!" he breathed. "You're real! And I like you much better that way."

"I don't know what on earth you're talking about," said she, "but it's all right with me."

She held up her face, and once more his lips closed on hers, this time in a wholly human embrace.



The Horror on the Links*

By SEABURY QUINN

IT MUST have been past midnight when the skirling of my bedroom telephone bell awakened me, for I could see the moon well down toward the western horizon as I looked through the window while reaching for the instrument.

"Doctor Trowbridge," came an excited feminine voice through the receiver, "this is Mrs. Maitland. Can you come right over? Something terrible has happened to Paul!"

"Eh?" I answered, half asleep. "What's wrong?"

"We—we don't know," she replied jerkingly. "He's unconscious. You know, he'd been to the dance at the country club with Gladys Phillips. We'd all been in bed hours when we heard someone banging on the front door. Mr. Maitland went down, and when he opened the door, Paul fell into the hall. Oh, doctor, he's been terribly hurt! Won't you please come right over?"

Physicians' sleep is like a park—public property. With a sigh I climbed out of bed and into my clothes, cranked my superannuated motor to life and set out for the Maitland house.

Young Maitland lay on his bed, his eyes closed, teeth tight-clenched, his face set in an expression of unutterable dread, even in his unconsciousness. Across his shoulders and on the backs of his arms I found several long incised wounds, as though his flesh had been raked by a sharp, pronged instrument.

I sterilized and bandaged the cuts, and applied restoratives, wondering what sort of encounter had produced such hurts.

"Help, help! Oh, God, help!" the lad muttered thickly, like a person trying to call out in a nightmare. "Oh, oh, it's got me; it's"—his words gave way to a gurgling, inarticulate cry of fear, and he sat bolt upright in bed, staring about with vacant, fear-filmed eyes.

"Easy, easy, young fellow," I soothed. "Lie back, now; take it easy, you're all right, you're home in bed."

He looked uncomprehendingly at me a moment, then fell to babbling inanely. "The ape-thing — the ape-thing!" he screamed in a frenzy. "It's got me! Open the door; for God's sake, open the door!"

"Here," I ordered gruffly as I drove

*From WEIRD TALES for October, 1925.

my hypodermic into his arm. "None o' that. You quiet down."

The opiate took effect almost immediately, and I left him with his parents while I returned to catch up the raveled ends of my interrupted sleep.

HEADLINES shrieked at me from the front page of the paper lying beside my grapefruit at breakfast:

SUPER FIEND SOUGHT IN GIRL'S SLAYING

BODY OF YOUNG WOMAN FOUND NEAR SEDGEMOOR COUNTRY CLUB MYSTIFIES POLICE—CRIMINAL PERVERT BLAMED FOR KILLING—ARREST IS IMMINENT

Almost entirely denuded of clothing, marred by a score of terrible wounds, her face battered nearly past recognition and her neck broken, the body of pretty Sarah Humphries, 19, a waitress in the employ of the Sedgemoor Country Club, was found lying in one of the bunkers of the club's golf course by John Burroughs, a green-keeper, early this morning. Miss Humphries, who had been employed at the clubhouse for three months, completed her duties shortly before midnight, and, according to statements of fellow workers, declared she was going to take a short cut across the links to the Andover Road, where she could get a trolley to the city. Her body, terribly mutilated, was found about twenty-five yards from the road on the golf course this morning.

Between the golf links and the Andover Road is a dense growth of trees, and it is thought the young woman was attacked while walking along the path through the woods to the road. Deputy Coroner Nesbett, who examined the body, gave his opinion that she had been dead about five hours when found. She had not been criminally assaulted.

Several suspicious characters have been seen in the neighborhood of the club's grounds recently, and the police are checking up on their movements. An early arrest is expected.

"There's two gintlemen to see ye, sor," Nora, my housekeeper, interrupted my perusal of the paper. " 'Tis Sergeant Costello an' a Frinchman, or Eyetalyun, or sumpin. They do be wantin' ter ax ye some questions about th' murther of th' pore little Humphries gurl."

"Ask *me* about the murder?" I protested. "Why, the first I knew of it was when I looked at this paper, and I'm not through reading the account of the crime yet."

"That's all right, Doctor Trowbridge," Detective Sergeant Costello answered with a laugh as he entered the dining-room. "We don't figure on arresting you; but we'd like to ask you some questions, if you don't mind. This is Professor de Grandin, of the Paris police. He's been doing some work for his department over here, an' when this murder broke, he offered the chief his help. We'll be needin' it, too, I'm thinkin.' Professor de Grandin, Doctor Trowbridge," he waved an introductory hand from one to the other of us.

The professor bowed stiffly from the hips, in continental fashion, then extended his hand with a friendly smile. He was a perfect example of the rare French blond type, rather under medium height, but with a military erectness of carriage which made him look several inches taller than he actually was. His light blue eyes were small and exceedingly deep-set, and would have been humorous had it not been for the curious cold directness of their gaze. With his wide mouth, light mustache waxed at the ends in two perfectly horizontal points, and those twinkling, stock-taking eyes, he reminded me of an alert tom-cat. Like a cat's, too, was his lithe, noiseless step as he crossed the room to shake hands.

"I fear Monsieur Costello gives you the misapprehension, doctor," he said in a pleasant voice, almost devoid of accent. "It is most true I am connected with the *Service de Sûreté,* but not as a vocation. My principal work is at the University of Paris and St. Lazaire Hospital; at present I combine my vocation of savant with my avocation of criminologist. You see——"

"Why," I interrupted, grasping his hand, "you are Professor Jules de Gran-

din, author of *Accentuated Evolution?*"

He shrugged deprecatingly. "Yes, I am he," he admitted with a smile; "but at present our inquiries lie in another field. You have a patient, one young Monsieur Paul Maitland, is it not? He was set upon last night in the Andover Road?"

"I have a patient named Paul Maitland," I admitted, "but I don't know where he received his injuries."

"Nor do we," he answered with a smile, "but we shall inquire. You will go with us while we question him? No?"

"Why, yes," I acquiesced. "I should be looking in on him this morning, anyhow."

"And now, *Monsieur,*" Professor de Grandin began when introductions had been completed, "you will please tell us what happened last night to you. Yes?"

Paul looked uncomfortably from one of us to the other and swallowed nervously. "I don't like to think of it," he confessed, "much less talk about it; but here's the truth, believe it or not:

"I took Gladys home from the club about 11 o'clock, for she had developed a headache. After I'd said good-night to her I decided to go home and turn in, and had gotten nearly here when I reached in my pocket for a cigarette. My case was gone, and I remembered laying it on a window-ledge just before my last dance.

"The Mater gave me that case last birthday, and I didn't want to lose it, so, instead of telephoning the club and asking one of the fellows to slip it in his pocket, like a fool I decided to drive back for it.

"You know—or at least Doctor Trowbridge and Sergeant Costello do—the Andover Road dips down in a little valley and curves over by the edge of the golf course between the eighth and ninth holes. I was just in that part of the road nearest the links when I heard a woman scream twice—it really wasn't two screams, more like one and a half, for her second cry was shut off almost before it started.

"I had a gun in my pocket, a little .22 automatic—good thing I did, too—so I yanked it out and drew up at the roadside, leaving my engine running. That was lucky, too, believe me.

"I ran into the woods, yelling at the top of my voice, and there in the path I saw something dark, like a woman's body, lying. I started toward it when there was a rustling in the trees overhead and—*plop!*—something dropped right into the path in front of me.

"Gentlemen, I don't know what it was, but I know it wasn't anything human. It wasn't quite as tall as I, but looked about twice as broad, and its hands hung down—clear down to the ground.

"I yelled, 'Hey, what're you doin'?' and pointed my gun at it, and it didn't answer, just started jumping up and down, bouncing with its feet and hands on the ground at once. I tell you, it gave me the horrors.

" 'Snap out of it!' I yelled again, 'or I'll blow your head off.' Next moment—I was so nervous and excited I didn't really know what I was doing—I let fly with the pistol, right in the thing's face.

"That came near being my last shot, too. Believe me or not, that thing, whatever it was, reached out, snatched the gun out of my hand and *broke it.* Yes, sir, snapped that pistol in two with its bare hands as easily as I could break a matchstick.

"And then it was on me. I felt one of its hands go clear over my shoulder, from breast to back in a single clutch, and it pulled me toward it. Ugh! It was hairy, sir. Hairy as an ape!"

"Morbleu! Yes? And then?" de Grandin murmured eagerly.

"Then I lunged out with all my might and kicked it on the shins. It released its grip a second, and I beat it. I ran as I never did on the quarter-mile track, jumped into the car and took off down the road with everything wide open. But I got these gashes in my back and arms before I got into the roadster. He made three or four grabs for me, and every one of 'em took the flesh away where his nails raked me. By the time I got home I was almost crazy with fright and pain and loss of blood. I remember kicking and banging on the door and yelling for the folks to open, and then I went out like a light."

The boy paused and regarded us seriously. "I know you think I'm the biggest liar out of jail," he announced, "but I've been telling you the absolute, honest-to-goodness truth."

Costello looked skeptical, but de Grandin nodded eagerly, affirmatively. "But of course, you speak truth," he replied. "Now tell me, young *Monsieur,* if you can, this *poilu,* this hairy one, how was he dressed?"

"Um," Paul wrinkled his brow in an effort at remembrance. "I can't say surely, for it was dark in the woods and I was pretty much excited, but—I—think he was in evening clothes. Yes; I'd swear to it. I saw his white shirt bosom."

"Ah," muttered de Grandin softly. "A hairy thing, a fellow who leaps up and down like a jumping-jack or an ape in his anger, and in evening clothes. It is to think, *mes amis.*"

"I'll say it is!" Costello agreed. "What sort o' hootch did they have out to th' club last night, young feller?"

"Doctor Trowbridge is wanted on the 'phone, please," a maid announced from the door. "You can take it on this one, if you wish, sir; it's connected with the main line."

I picked up the instrument from young Maitland's bedside table and called, "Hello, Doctor Trowbridge speaking."

"This is Mrs. Comstock, doctor," a voice informed me. "Your housekeeper told us you were at Mrs. Maitland's. Can you come to my house, please? Mr. Manly, my daughter's fiancé, was hurt last night."

"Hurt last night?" I repeated.

"Yes, out by the country club."

"Very well, I'll be over shortly," I answered, then held out my hand to de Grandin.

"Sorry to have to run away," I apologized, "but another man was hurt at the club last night."

"Ah?" he replied interrogatively. "That club, it is an unfortunate place. May I accompany you, doctor? This other man, he may tell us something also."

"Very well," I agreed, "I'll be pleased to have your company."

YOUNG Manly's injury proved to be a gunshot wound inflicted by a small-caliber weapon, and was located in the left shoulder. He was very reticent concerning its cause, and neither de Grandin nor I felt inclined to inquire too insistently, for Mrs. Comstock hovered about the sickroom from our entrance until the treatment was concluded.

"Nom d'un petit porc!" de Grandin muttered as we left the Comstock residence. "He is close-mouthed, that one. Almost, it would seem—pah! I talk the rot. Let us get to the morgue, *cher docteur.* You shall drive me there in your motor and tell me what it is you see. Oft-times you gentlemen of the general practise see things which we specialists overlook because of the mental blindness of our specialties. *N'est-ce-pas?"*

In the cold, uncharitable light of the city mortuary we viewed the remains of poor little Sarah Humphries. As the newspa-

per had said, she was disfigured by twenty or more wounds, running, for the most part, in converging lines down her shoulders and arms, deeply incised, deep enough to reveal the bone where skin and flesh had been completely shorn through in places. On her throat and neck were five distinct livid patches, one some three inches in size, roughly square, the other four extending in parallel lines almost completely around her neck, terminating in deeply pitted scars, as if the talons of some predatory beast had been sunk into her flesh. But the most terrifying item of the grisly sight was the poor girl's face. Repeated blows had reduced her once pretty features to an empurpled level; bits of sand and fine gravel still bedded in the cuticle told how her countenance must have been ground into the earth with terrific force. Never, since my days as emergency hospital interne, had I seen so sickening an array of injuries on a single body.

"Eh, what do you see, my friend?" the little Frenchman demanded in a raucous whisper. "You think—what?"

"It's terrible——" I began, but he interrupted impatiently:

"But of course. One does not expect the beautiful at the morgue. I ask what you see, not for your esthetic impressions. *Pardieu!*"

"If you want to know what interests me most," I answered, "it is those wounds on her shoulders and arms. Except in degree, they are exactly like those which I treated on young Maitland last night."

"Ah—yes?" de Grandin responded, his little blue eyes dancing with excitement, his cat's-whiskers mustache bristling more fiercely than ever. "Name of a little blue man! We begin to make progress. Now"—he touched the lividities on the dead girl's throat daintily with the tip of one well-manicured nail—"these marks, do they tell you anything?"

I shook my head. "Possibly the bruise left by some sort of garrote," I hazarded. "They are too long and thick for finger-prints; besides, there's no thumb mark."

"Ha, ha," he laughed mirthlessly. "No thumb mark, do you say? My dear sir, had there been a thumb mark, I should have been all at sea. These marks, they are the stigmata of truth on the young Monsieur Maitland's story. When were you last at the zoo, eh?"

"At the zoo?" I echoed stupidly.

"But of course, have you never noted the quadrumana, how they take hold? My dear sir, it would, perhaps, not be too great an exaggeration to say the thumb is the difference between man and monkey. Man and the chimpanzee grasp an object with the fingers, using the thumb as a fulcrum. The gorilla, the orang-utan, the gibbon, he is a fool, he knows not how to use his thumb. "Now see"—again he indicated the bruises—"this large patch, that represents the heel of the hand, these encircling lines, they are the fingers, these wounds, they are nail prints. Name of an old one-eyed tom-cat! It was truth the young Maitland told. It was an ape which accosted him in the *bois*. An ape in evening clothes! What think you from that, *hein?*"

"God knows," I answered helplessly. "I give up."

"Oui, Monsieur le Docteur," de Grandin lapsed into his native tongue in his earnestness, "truly, God does know. But I, do I give up? Me, I am like your so splendid Paul Jones, I have but commenced to fight!"

He turned abruptly from the dead girl and, seizing my elbow, urged me from the morgue. "No more, no more now," he declared. "You have your mission of help to the sick to perform, and I have my work, also, to do. If you will take me once more to your charming suburb I will leave you to your duties while I pur-

sue mine, and, if the imposition is not too great, I will dwell at your house while on this case. You consent? Good!

"Until tonight, then," he hailed as he leaped agilely from the car at the village limits. "I shall attempt to be at the house before you have—how do you say?—hit into the straw? *Bien, au revoir, cher ami.*"

It was somewhere about eight o'clock when de Grandin returned to my house, laden with almost enough bundles to tax a motor truck's capacity. "Great Scott, professor," I exclaimed as he laid his parcels on a convenient chair and gave me a grin which sent the waxed points of his mustache shooting upward like a miniature pair of horns, "have you been buying out the town?"

"Almost," he admitted as he seated himself and lit a vile-smelling French cigarette. "I have talked much with the grocer, the druggist, the garage keeper and the tobacconist, and at each place I make purchases. I am, for the time, a new resident of your so pleasant suburb, anxious to find out about my neighbors and my new home. I have talk, talk, talk. I have milled over much wordy chaff, *hélas!* But from it I have extracted some good meal, *grâce à Dieu!*"

He fixed his curiously unwinking cat-stare on me and asked: "You have a Monsieur Kalmar resident here, have you not?"

"Yes," I replied, "I believe we have."

"And you can tell me of him?"—he paused, raising his eyebrows questioningly.

"No," I answered, "I'm afraid I can't. He's lived here about a year, and kept very much to himself. As far as I know, he has made friends with no one in the village, and has been visited by no one but the tradesmen. I've been given to understand he is a scientist of some sort, and took the old Means place, out on the Andover Road, so he could pursue his experiments in quiet."

"Ah, yes, I see," de Grandin tapped his cigarette case thoughtfully with his finger tips; "that much I have already gathered from my talks this day. Now tell me, if you can, is this Monsieur All-Unknown a friend of the young Manly's—the gentleman whose wound from gunshot you treated this morning?"

"Not that I know," I replied. "I've never seen them together. Manly is a queer, moody sort of chap, never has much to say to anyone. How Millicent Comstock came to fall in love with him I've no idea. He rides well, and is highly thought of by her mother, but those are about the only qualifications he has as a husband, that I've been able to see."

"He is very strong, no?" de Grandin queried.

"I don't know," I had to confess.

"Well, then," he returned, "listen at me. You think de Grandin is a fool, eh? Perhaps yes; perhaps no. This day I make other business besides talk. I go to that Comstock lady's house and reconnoiter. In an ash-can I find one pair of patent leather dress shoes, much scratched. I grease the palm of a servant and find out they are that Monsieur Manly's. I also look farther and find one white-linen dress shirt, with blood on it. It is torn about the cuffs and split at the shoulder, that shirt. It, too, I find, belong to Monsieur Manly. I am like a Jewish second-hand man when I talk with that servant of Madame Comstock—I buy from him that shirt and those shoes. Behold!"

Undoing a parcel, he exhibited a pair of dress shoes and a shirt, as though they were curios of priceless value. "In Paris we have ways of making the inanimate talk," he asserted as he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew forth a bit of folded paper. "That shirt and those shoes I put through the third degree, and I find

this." Opening the paper, he disclosed three coarse, dull-brown hairs, varying from a half-inch to three inches in length.

I examined them curiously. From their appearance they might have been from a man's head, for they were too long and insufficiently curved to be body-hairs, but their texture seemed too harsh for human growth.

"Um," I commented non-committally.

"Um," he mocked. "You cannot classify them, eh? No?"

"No," I admitted. "They are entirely too coarse to have come from Manly's head. Besides, they are almost black; his hair is a distinct brown."

"My friend," de Grandin leaned forward suddenly, staring me straight in the eye, "those hairs, I have seen such before. So have you, but you do not recognize them. *They are from a gorilla!*"

"Impossible!" I jerked back. "How could a gorilla's hair get on Manly's shirt?"

"Not on," he corrected, still gazing directly at me. "They were *in* it, below the neck line, where a bullet had torn through the linen and wounded him. The hairs were embedded in the dried blood. Look at this garment"—he held the shirt before me for inspection—"behold how it is split. It has been upon a body too big for it. Monsieur Trowbridge, that shirt was worn by the thing—the monster—which killed that pitiful girl dead on the links last night, which attacked the young Maitland a few minutes later—and which got this paint from the side of Madam Comstock's house on these shoes when it climbed that house last night.

"You start, you stare? You say to yourself, 'De Grandin, he is mad'? Listen, I prove each step in the ladder:

"This morning, while you examine Monsieur Manly's wound, I examine him and his room. On his window-sill I note a few scrapes—such scrapes as one who drag his legs and feet might make climbing over the window-ledge. I look out at the window, and on the white-painted side of the house I find fresh paint-scratches. Too, also, I find marks on the painted iron pipe which carry the water from the roof down in rainy weather. That pipe runs down the corner of the house, near Manly's window, but too far away for a man to reach it from the sill. But if that man have arms as long as my leg, what then? Ah, he could make the reach most easy.

"Now, when I buy these shoes, that shirt, from the Comstock servant, I note the paint on the shoe, and the scratch also thereon. I compare the paint on the shoe with the paint on the house-sides. He are the same.

"I note that shirt, how he are blood-stained, how he are all burst, as though the man who wear him suddenly grow great and break him out. I find the beast-hairs in the blood-stain on the shirt. I take that shirt to the laundry and ask the excellent *Chinois*, 'Whose shirt are this?'

"I say, 'You are liar, but I give you this'—I show him a bill of ten dollair—'to tell the truth.'

"He take my bill and smile like summer as he reply, 'Mr. Manly's.' *Voilà!* You see?"

"No, I'll be hanged if I do," I denied.

He bent forward again, speaking with rapid earnestness: "That servant, he tell me more. Last night the young Manly was nervous—what you call ill at ease. He complain of headache, of backache—he feel r-r-rotten. He go to bed early, and his *amoureuse*, she go without him to the country club dance. The old *madame*, she, too, go to bed.

"The young man, he go for walk, because he cannot sleep, he tell that servant that this morning. But the servant, he was up with the toothache all night, and while he hear the young man come in

after midnight, *he did not hear him leave.*

"Now, what you think? A policeman of the motorcycle tell me he see the young Manly come from that Monsieur Kalmar's house, staggering like one drunk. He wonders, that policeman, if Monsieur Kalmar keep so much to himself because he are a legger-of-the-boot. Eh? What now, *cher docteur?* You say what?"

"Damn it!" I exploded; "you're piecing out the silliest nonsense-story I ever heard, de Grandin. One of us is crazy as hell, and I don't think it's I!"

"Neither of us is crazy, *mon vieux,*" he returned gravely, "but men have gone mad with knowing what I know, and madder yet with suspect what I am beginning to suspect. Will you drive me past the house of Monsieur Kalmar?"

A few minutes' run carried us out to the lonely house occupied by the eccentric old man whose year's residence near the village had been a twelve months' mystery.

"Ah, ha," de Grandin exclaimed as we passed the place, "he works late, this one. Observe, the lights burn in his workshop."

Sure enough, from a window at the rear of the house a shaft of electric light cut the evening shadows, and, as we stopped the car and gazed, we could see Kalmar's bent form, swathed in a laboratory apron, passing and repassing the window as he shuffled nervously back and forth across the room.

"Let us go," de Grandin suggested, turning from his silent contemplation of the worker. "While we drive back, I will tell you a story.

"Before the war which racked the world, there came to Paris from the University of Vienna one Doctor Beneckendorff. As a man he was intolerable, as a scholar he was incomparable. The knowledge of the greatest savants concerning organic evolution and comparative anatomy were but as children's A, B, C to that one. With my own two eyes I have seen him perform experiments which, in an age less tolerant of learning—perhaps in your own America, with its so curious laws against the teaching of scientific truth—would have brought him to the stake as a wizard.

"But science is God's tool, my friend, and it is not meant that man should play at being God. That man, he went too far. We had to restrain him in prison."

"Yes?" I answered, not particularly interested in the narrative. "What did he do?"

"Eh, what did he not do?" de Grandin replied. "Children of the poor were found missing at night. They were nowhere. The gendarmes' search narrowed to the laboratory of this Beneckendorff, and there they found not the poor infants, but a half-score ape-creatures, not wholly human, not wholly simian, but partaking horribly of the appearance of each, with fur and hand-like feet, but with the face of something which had once been of mankind. They were dead, those poor ones, fortunately for them.

"He proved mad, like the bug of June, as you Americans say, but ah, my friend, what a mentality, what a fine brain gone bad!

"We shut him up for the safety of the public, and for the safety of the race we burned his notebooks and destroyed the serums with which he had injected the human babes to turn them into apes."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed.

"Incredible, yes," de Grandin admitted, "but not, unfortunately, impossible—for him; but in the turbulent days of war when the *Boche* thundered at the gates of Paris, he escaped."

"Good God!" I cried. "You mean to say, de Grandin, this mad fiend, this maker of monsters, is loose on the world?"

He shrugged his shoulders with Gallic

fatalism. "Perhaps. All trace of him has vanished, though there are reports he was later seen in the Congo Belgique."

"But——"

"Ah, no, I ramble on like a fool. Of what connection is this remembrance of mine with the case of Sarah Humphries? *Pardieu,* none!

"One favor, *Monsieur,* if you please; let me accompany you once more when you attend the young Manly. I would have a one minute's talk with Madame Comstock. Perhaps——"

His voice trailed off into silence.

MRS. CORNELIA COMSTOCK was a lady of imposing physique and even more imposing manner. She was wont to receive respectful and ceremonious consideration from society reporters, her fellow club members, even from solicitors for "causes." But to de Grandin she was simply a woman who had information which he desired. Prefacing his inquiry with the sort of bow none but a Frenchman can achieve, he began directly:

"Madame Comstock, do you, or did you ever, know one Doctor Beneckendorff?"

Mrs. Comstock, who was used to dominating her husband, her daughter and all mankind in general, drew herself stiffly erect and directed a withering gaze at him.

"My good man——" she began, as though he were an overcharging taxi-driver, but the Frenchman met her cold eyes with eyes equally cold and uncompromising.

"You will answer my questions, please," he told her. "Primarily I represent the Republic of France; but I also represent humanity. Once more, please, did you ever know a Doctor Beneckendorff?"

Mrs. Comstock's imperious glance lowered before de Grandin's unwinking stare, and her thin lips twitched slightly as she replied, "Yes."

"Ah. We make progress. When did you know him—in what circumstances? Believe me, you may speak in confidence before me and Doctor Trowbridge, but please to speak frankly. The importance is great."

"I knew Otto Beneckendorff many years ago," the lady answered in a low voice. "He had just come to this country from Europe, and was teaching science at the university near which I lived as a girl. We—we were engaged."

"Ah? So. And your betrothal was broken? For what reason, please?"

Looking at her, I could scarcely recognize the community's social dictator in Mrs. Cornelia Comstock as she regarded de Grandin with wondering, frightened eyes. She shivered, as though she felt a sudden draft of chilled air, before answering. "He—he was impossible, sir. We had vivisectionists, even in those days—but this man seemed to torture poor, helpless animals for the love of it. I gave him back his ring when he boasted of one of his experiments to me. He seemed to enjoy telling how the poor beast suffered before it died.

"Eh bien," de Grandin shot me a meaning glance, as though I, too, followed the thread his examination unraveled, "we do progress. Good. Your betrothal, then, was broken. He left you, this so cruel experimenter. Did he leave in friendship?" He leaned forward, waxed cat-mustaches bristling, as he waited her reply in breathless eagerness.

Mrs. Comstock looked like one on the verge of fainting as she almost whispered: "No, no; he left me with a terrible threat. I remember his very words—can I ever forget them? He said, 'I go from you; but I shall return. Nothing but death can cheat me. I shall bring on you and yours

a horror such as no man has known since the days before Adam.' "

De Grandin almost danced as she finished speaking. "Ah, ha," he exclaimed, "the explanation is ours! The mystery is almost solved. Thank you, *Madame*. If you will tell me one more little thing, I shall retire and trouble you no more:

"Your daughter, she is betrothed to one Monsieur Manly. Tell me, I beg, when and where did she meet this young man?"

"I introduced them," the lady replied with a return of something of her frigid manner. "Mr Manly came to my husband with letters of introduction from an old schoolmate of his—a fellow student at the university—in Capetown."

"Eh?" de Grandin almost shrieked. "Capetown, do you say? Capetown, South Africa? *Nom d'un petit bonhomme!* From Capetown! When was this, *Madame*, please?"

"A year ago. Why——"

"And Monsieur Manly, he has lived with you how long?" the question shut off her offended protest half uttered.

"Mr. Manly is *stopping* with us," she answered icily. "He is to marry my daughter, Millicent, next month. Really, sir, I fail to see what interest the Republic of France, which you represent, and humanity, which you also claim to represent, can have in my private affairs. If——"

"And his Capetown friend," de Grandid interrupted feverishly. "Tell me, his name was what, and his business?"

"I——"

"Tell me!" he cried impatiently, extending his slender hands as though to choke the answer from her. *"Nom d'un fusil!* I must know. At once!"

"We do not know his street and number," Mrs. Comstock replied. "His name is Alexander Findlay, and he is a diamond factor."

"Ah, ah! *Bien*. Thank you, *Madame*. You have been most kind," said de Grandin, and he struck his heels together and bowed as though hinged at the hips.

It was past midnight when the 'phone rang insistently. "Western Union speaking," a girl's voice announced over the wire. "Cablegram for Doctor de Grandin. Ready?"

"Yes," I answered, seizing the pencil and pad beside the instrument. "Read it, please."

" 'No person by name Alexander Findlay diamond factor known here no record of such person in last five years. Signed, Burlingame, Inspector of Police.'

"The cable is from Capetown, South Africa," she added as I finished jotting down her dictation.

"Very good," I replied. "Forward a typed confirmation in the morning, please."

Then I went to de Grandin's room with the message.

"Mille tonnerres!" he shouted, flinging the covers back, as I read him the cablegram. "De Grandin, he is a fool, *hein?* Listen——"

He leaped from the bed and raced across the room to where his coat hung over a chair. Extracting a black-leather notebook, almost as large as a desk dictionary, he thumbed its pages rapidly, finally found the entry he sought.

"Behold! This Monsieur Kalmar, whom no one knows about, he has lived here ten months and twenty-six days. I have it from that so stupid real estate broker who think I ask information for a directory of scientists.

"That young Monsieur Manly, he have known those Comstocks for 'about a year.' He bring them a letter of introduction from a schoolmate of Monsieur Comstock who are unknown to the Capetown police. *Pardieu!* Hereafter Jules de Grandin he sleep all day and prowl all night. To-

morrow, *Monsieur*, you shall introduce me to the gun merchant. I desire to possess one Winchester rifle."

The time drifted by, de Grandin going, gun in hand, each night to his lonely vigil; but no developments in the mystery of the Humphries murder or the attack on Paul Maitland were reported.

The date for Millicent Comstock's wedding approached and the big mansion was filled to overflowing with boisterous young folks; still de Grandin continued to invert the time, sleeping by day, patrolling by night.

Two nights before the marriage day he accosted me as he came downstairs. "Trowbridge, my friend, you have been most patient with me. If you will come tonight, I think, perhaps, I can show you some result."

"All right," I agreed. "I haven't the slightest idea what all this folderol is about, but I'm willing to be convinced."

At his request I got out my car and drove to within a block of the Comstock house, parking the machine in a small copse of trees where it would be readily accessible, yet effectually concealed.

"My friend," de Grandin began as we skirted the Comstock lawn, keeping well hidden in the shadows, "I am not certain of what I do. I am like one who walks an unfamiliar path with a hoodwink on his eyes; yet my brain tell me I follow no false road. No man knows what part Tanit, the Moon Goddess, plays in the affairs of men, even today, when her name is forgotten by all but dusty-dry antiquaries. This we know, however; at the entrance of life our appearance is governed, in the matter of days, by the phase of the moon. You, as a physician with obstetrical knowledge, know that. Too, when the time to go approach, the crisis of dis-

(Please turn to page 628)

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(Continued from preceding page)
ease is often governed by the moon's phase. Why this is we know not; that it is we know full well. Suppose, then, the cellular organization of a body be violently, unnaturally, changed, and nature's whole force be exerted toward a readjustment. Is it not reasonable to suppose that the moon, which affect childbirth and death, might have some force to apply in such a case?"

"I dare say," I conceded, "but I don't follow you. Just what is it you expect, or suspect, de Grandin?"

"Nothing," he answered. "I suspect nothing, I affirm nothing, I deny nothing. I am agnostic, but I am hopeful. If events prove me a doting fool, making a great, black *lutin* of my own shadow, no one will be happier than I. But he who prepares for the worst is most agreeably disappointed if the best occurs."

He touched my elbow. "Here we rest awhile," he murmured, squatting in the shadow of a small clump of dwarf pines. "That light, it is in the window of Mademoiselle Millicent's room, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Yes," I confirmed, wondering if I were on a fool's errand with a lunatic for company.

The merrymaking inside the house was wearing to a close as we took our station; within half an hour the mansion was shrouded in quiet darkness.

De Grandin fidgeted nervously, fussing with the lock of his gun, ejecting and reinserting cartridges, playing a devil's tattoo on the barrel with his long, tapering fingers.

Almost like a floodlight turned on the scene, the moon's radiance suddenly deluged the house, grounds and surroundings with silver as the wind swept aside a veil of clouds.

"Ah," de Grandin muttered, "now we shall see what we shall see—perhaps."

As though his words had been a cue, there echoed from the house before us a scream of such wild, bewildered terror as few men have been unfortunate enough to hear. In the course of twenty years' active practise of medicine I had heard almost every sort of cry that physical anguish can wring from tortured flesh, but never anything like this. Fear—stark, hideous fear—played on the vocal cords of the screamer like a madman twanging a harp, bringing forth a symphony of terror that stopped the breath, hot and sulfurous, in my throat, and sent an itching tingle through my scalp.

"A-a-ah!" de Grandin exclaimed in a rising tone as he grasped his rifle and stared fixedly at the house. "*Grand Dieu*, grant he comes forth! Only that, and I shall be content."

Light flashed inside the house. The patter of terrified feet sounded among the babel of wondering, questioning voices, but the scream was not repeated.

"A-a-ah!" de Grandin breathed again, his voice razor-edged with excitement. "Look, my friend. *Le gorille!* Behold, he comes!"

Emerging from Millicent's window, horrible as a devil from lowest hell, was a great, hairy head set low upon a pair of shoulders which must have been four feet across. An arm which, somehow, reminded me of a giant snake, slipped forth, grasped the cast-iron downspout at the corner of the house, and drew a thick-set, misshapen body after it. A leg, tipped with a prehensile, hand-like foot, was thrown over the sill, and like a spider from its lair, the monster leaped from the darkened window and hung a moment to the iron pipe with its sable body silhouetted against the white walls of the house.

But what was that, the white-robed form which hung pendent from the grasp of the beast's free arm? My staring eyes strained across the moonlit night and my mouth went dry with horror.

Like a beautiful white moth inert in the grasp of the spider, her fair hair unbound and falling like a golden veil before her marble-white face, her night clothing rent into a motley of tatters, Millicent Comstock hung in the creature's grasp.

"Shoot, shoot, man; for God's sake, shoot!" I screamed, but only a whisper, inaudible ten feet away, came from my fear-thickened lips.

"Silence, fool!" de Grandin ground between his teeth, as he pressed his gunstock against his cheek and drew the muzzle in line with the descending brute's body.

Slowly, so slowly it seemed an hour was consumed in the process, the great primate descended the waterpipe, leaping the last fifteen feet of the trip and crouching on the moonlit lawn, its tiny, deepset eyes glaring malignantly, as though it challenged the world for possession of its prey.

I could hear de Grandin's breath rasping in his nostrils as he sighted his gun and drew the trigger.

A roar like a bursting shell sounded as the smokeless powder's flash burned a gash in the night and a bullet went screaming through the air.

Again de Grandin fired, throwing the magazine mechanism with feverish haste.

The monster staggered drunkenly against the house as the detonation of the first shot sounded. With the second, it dropped Millicent's body to the lawn and uttered a cry which was part roar, part snarl, and trailing one of its hairy arms helplessly, leaped toward the woods, crossing the grass plot in great, awkward leaps which reminded me, absurdly, of the bouncing of a huge inflated ball.

(Please turn to page 630)

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Because of the many requests for back issues of WEIRD TALES, the publishers do their best to keep a sufficient supply on hand to meet all demands. This magazine was established early in 1923 and there has been a steady drain on the supply of back copies ever since. At present, we have the following back numbers on hand for sale:

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June	....	June	June	June	
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(Continued from preceding page)

"Attend *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin commanded sharply, throwing a fresh cartridge into his firing-chamber. "I will see to the hairy one. Have no fear, I have shot his brethren in Africa."

I BENT above the girl's huddled body, putting my ear to her breast. Faint but perceptible, I made out a heart-beat, and lifted her in my arms, carrying her toward the house.

"Doctor Trowbridge!" Mrs. Comstock, followed by a throng of frightened, half-clothed guests, met me at the front door. "What has happened? Good heavens, Millicent!" She rushed forward, seizing her daughter's flaccid hands in both her own trembling ones. "Oh, what is it; what is it?"

"Help me get Millicent to bed and get me some smelling-salts and some brandy," I commanded, ignoring her questions.

A few minutes later, with restoratives applied and electric pads at her feet and back, the girl showed signs of returning consciousness.

"Get out—all of you," I ordered curtly. Hysterical women, even patients' mothers, are no fit occupants for the room when consciousness is regained after profound shock.

Millicent stirred in her faint, rolling her head feebly from side to side and moaning. "Oh, oh, the ape-thing—the ape-thing!" she whimpered in a small, childish voice. It was not till several hours later I realized she used exactly the term Paul Maitland had employed when recovering from his faint.

"All right, dear," I comforted. "It's all right, now. You're safe in bed. Old Doctor Trowbridge is here; he won't let anything hurt you."

She half opened her lovely eyes, saw me sitting beside her, and smiled sleepily in reassurance. Next moment she was soundly and naturally asleep, both her hands clasping one of mine.

"DOCTOR, Doctor Trowbridge," Mrs. Comstock whispered from the bedroom door. "We've searched all over the place, and there's no sign of Mr. Manly. Do—do you suppose anything could have happened to him?"

"I think it quite likely something could—and did," I answered, turning from her to smooth her daughter's hair.

"Par la barbe d'un bouc noir!" de Grandin exclaimed as, disheveled, but with a light of exhilaration in his direct blue eyes, he met me in the Comstock hall some two hours later. *"Chère* Madame Comstock, you are to be congratulated. But for my so brave colleague, Doctor Trowbridge, and my own lowly self, your charming daughter had shared the fate of that never-enough-to-be-pitied Sarah Humphries.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux,* I have not been quite frank with you. I have not told you all. But this thing, it was so incredible, so seemingly impossible, that you would not have believed. Even now, knowing what you know, having seen with your two eyes what you have seen this night, you do not quite believe. *Eh bien,* perhaps it is better so.

"To begin: When this *sacré* Beneckendorff was in the madhouse, he raved continually about his confinement cheating him of his revenge—the revenge he had so long planned against one Madame Comstock of America.

"We French, we are logical, not like you English and Americans. We write down and keep for possible reference even what a madman say. Why not? It may be useful some day.

"Now, friend Trowbridge, I tell you

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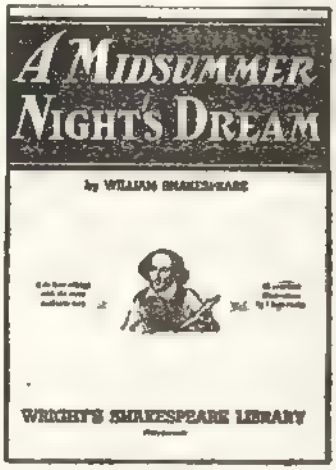

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(Continued from page 630)

some time ago this Beneckendorff were reported in the Congo Belgique. Yes? But I do not tell you he were reported in charge of a young, half-grown gorilla. No.

"When this *pauvre* Mademoiselle Humphries is killed in that so terrible manner I remember my own African days and I say to me, 'Ah, ha, it look as if *Monsieur le Gorille*—the gorilla—have been about this place. I ask to know if any such have escape from a circus or zoo from near by or far. All answers are no.

"Then the Sergeant Costello, he bring me to this so splendid savant, Doctor Trowbridge, and with him I go to interview that young Paul Maitland who have encountered much strangeness on the golf links where the young woman was killed.

"And what do he tell me? He relate of a thing that have hair, that jump up and down like an enraged ape and that act like a gorilla, but wear man's evening clothes. *Parbleu!* It is to think! No gorilla have escape, yet what *seems* one is here encountered, wearing the clothes of a man. I search my memory. I remember that madman and the poor infants he turn into monkey-things with his damnable serums.

"I say: 'If he can turn man-children into monkey-things, why not can he turn ape-things into men-things? Eh?'

"I find one Doctor Kalmar live here unknown. I search about, and learn a certain man here are seen coming from his place in secret. I also find in this certain man's discarded shirt the hair of a gorilla. *Morbleu!* I think some more, and the thoughts I think are not pleasant thoughts.

"I reason: 'Suppose this serum which make a man-thing of an ape are not permanent? What then? If it are not renewed at times, the man becomes an ape again.' You follow? *Bien.*

"Now, the other day, I learn something which make me think some more. This Beneckendorff, he rave against one Madame Comstock. You, Madame Comstock, admit you once knew this Beneckendorff. He have loved you, as he understand love; now he hate you as only he with his diseased, but great brain, can hate. Is it not against you he plan his devilish scheme? I think so.

"I send a cablegram—never mind who to; Doctor Trowbridge knows that—and I get the answer I expect, but fear. The man in whose shirt I find those gorilla hairs is no man at all, he is one terrible masquerade of a man. So. Now, I reason, 'Suppose this masquerading monkey-thing do not get his serum as expected, what will he do?' I fear to answer my own question, but I do answer it, just the same, and I buy a gun.

"This gun have bullets of soft lead, and I make them still more efficient by cutting a V-shaped notch in each of their heads. When they strike something they spread out for a space you could not cover with your hand.

"*Voilà!* I take my gun and wait. Tonight what I have expect come about. I am ready. I shoot, and each time my bullet strike, it tear a great hole in the body of the man-who-is-an-ape. He drop his prey and seek the shelter his little ape-brain tell him to fly to. He goes to the house of this so unknown Doctor Kalmar. I follow quick.

"The ape are tortured with my bullet wounds. When he reach the house of Kalmar, he is angry, and set upon this Kalmar and tear him to pieces, even as he have killed poor Sarah Humphries before. I, arriving with my gun, I kill the gorilla with one more shot.

"But before I come back here I recognize the dead corpse of that Doctor Kal-

mar. He are one and the same as that Beneckendorff who have escape from our Paris madhouse.

"I destroy his devil's brews with which he make monkeys of men and men of monkeys. It is better their secret be never known.

"I think the Mademoiselle Humphries were so unfortunate as to meet this man-ape when he were on his way to Kalmar's house, as he had been taught to come. As man, perhaps, he knew not this Kalmar, or, as we know him, Beneckendorff; but as brute this Beneckendorff was the only man he know—his master, the man who brought him from Africa.

"When he find that poor girl, she scream, and his savageness become uppermost—believe me, the gorilla is ten thousand times more savage than the lion—and he tear her to pieces. He also try to tear the young Maitland to pieces; but, luckily for him and for us, he fail, and we get the story which put us on the track.

"*Voilà!* It is finished. *Triomphe!* I make my report to the good Sergeant Costello, and show him the bodies at Kalmar's house. Then I return to France. The ministry of health, they will be glad to know that Beneckendorff is no more."

"But, Monsieur de Grandin," Mrs. Comstock demanded, "who was this man—or this ape—you killed?"

I held my breath as de Grandin fixed his direct stare on her, then sighed with relief as he replied, "I cannot say, *Madame.*"

"Well"—Mrs. Comstock's natural disputatiousness came to the surface—"I think it's *very queer* you know so much about him; but don't know his name."

"Ah, *Madame,*" he shook his head sadly, "there are very many queer things

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in life; things which may puzzle even you. I bid you good-night.

"WHEN the police look for Monsieur Manly—*mon dieu,* what a name for an ape-thing!—they will be puzzled," he told me as we walked toward my waiting motor. "I must remember to warn Sergeant Costello to enter that disappearance on his books as a case permanently unsolved. No one will ever know the true facts but you, I and the French Ministry of Health, Trowbridge, my friend. The public, they would not believe, even if we told them."

I wonder if they will?

ALTHOUGH there is much routine work connected with editing a magazine, there are countervailing compensations which give a zest to the job. One of the most satisfactory phases of an editor's work is the uncovering of new literary talent. No matter how drab and uninteresting many of the manuscripts may be, the editor opens each new envelope with the hope that he may find a new literary light, who in time may become an acknowledged master of weird fiction. WEIRD TALES has uncovered many such. Another compensation for the drudgery of editorial work is the pitting of the editor's judgment against that of his readers, to guess in advance what stories will receive the readers' accolade. Most of the time our judgment is vindicated by the consensus of the readers. *The Outsider* by H. P. Lovecraft, *The Woman of the Wood* by A. Merritt, *The Stranger from Kurdistan* by E. Hoffmann Price, and *Shambleau* by C. L. Moore (to name just a few) were sure-fire selections for popularity (pardon the mixed metaphor), and the editor's judgment was confirmed by a flood of letters from you, the readers. But the editor was not prepared for the acclaim that greeted *They Called Him Ghost* by Laurence J. Cahill—a splendid story this was, too, and deserving of all the praise the readers bestowed upon it. And then there was that little "filler" story by Mary Elizabeth Counselman, *The Three Marked Pennies,* which was tucked away unobtrusively in the back of the magazine without even an illustration to call attention to it. Had the editor guessed what a deluge of favorable comment was to pour over his desk, he would have played that story up in the front of the issue with a full-page illustration to set it off.

Presenting Trudy

Gertrude Hemken, of Chicago, writes another of her interesting letters to the Eyrie: "And now comes me with my usual monthly digest of sense and nonsense (if I can induce this pen to write right). Mrs. Brundage made a lovely corpse on the cover design—it looks authentic enough according to Dorothy Quick's description. The eyes on the girl in blue are still too large for most any person. How well she (Mrs. Brundage) uses the primary colors! Now to get inside the covers. Dorothy Quick certainly offered some strange orchids in her tale. She's certainly proving herself a weird writer. Well (I pause to pout) *The Brood of Bubastis* was

scary enough—I like tales of Old English countrysides—the idea of Egyptians in England is unique, but probable, if you ask me. My reason for pouting, Mr. Bloch, is that I like cats and I sorta shuddered at the thought of the cat-headed goddess chawin' up human folk—s'pose—if I wouldn't be too skeered—I'd probably scratch her ear or jaw—and then listen to the purring! However, I can see where that young 'un up Milwaukee way is a follower of Lovecraft. The two of them make me shiver and want to duck my head under the covers. Brrr! M—um—um! Who is this Henry Hasse? He's a marvel! I don't believe I ever read anything as different and odd as *The Guardian of the Book.* Words actually fail me—it is so very—it leaves me helpless to express my feelings! Virgil's illustration is as weirdly fascinating as the story. You have two young masterpieces there. I can only gasp! Now that I have my breath I'm ready to lose it again in *The Dark Star.* Such a battle of wills is seldom, if ever, waged. A villain from the past is mostly all will—to fight such and win is real strength! Earl Peirce, Jr., was mighty good with his *Last Archer.* It seems said Last Archer was a tangible ghost. Now here's a subject for debate—did he kill himself a suicide—or did he kill himself a murderer? P'raps he was two selves—the good and the evil—something on the order of *Eric Martin's Nemesis* in the same issue. Now that's a topic for meditation, when one wants to get a good headache. Guess I'm sorta expecting too much of Eando Binder—I'm still thinking of that Sapphire story—so I found *The Elixir of Death* most interesting, but not sweet. However, who can expect anything sweet from an alchemist? . . . So the man became a werewolf from an ancient ointment! Now I know how they are made. Or is that just one method, Mr. Wellman? Not that I'm really curious—I'd rather read about than see one. Edmond Hamilton did a neat piece of work. *The Seeds from Outside* was ver' ver' nice. *The Anatomy Lesson* was much different from Rembrandt's painting. I should say so! The confession was unique in that the professor gave a lecture at the same time. Ugh—Lovecraft gave me chills in my teeth. The reprint, *The Picture in the House,* spoiled my appetite—which isn't easily spoiled. Needless to say, I liked the yarn—as I do most of Lovecraft's writings."

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About Serials

Gordon R. Pugh, of Streetsville, Ontario, writes: "I saw in the present March issue of WT two letters wanting serials. Well, I'm one reader who says serials, yeah, but make them two a year and let them last only two issues each. Please don't let's have any more of those long-winded stories covering six months, stories that could be told in two issues. The authors go into too much detail, to my mind. In this month's best I class *The Brood of Bubastis* first, with *The Last Archer* and *The Guardian of the Book* running neck and neck for second place. I always like your short stories. Why not reprint some of the great Howard's King Kull stories? How about it, fans?"

Three Loyal Fans

Willis Conover, Jr., of Cambridge, Maryland, writes: "Dorothy Quick's reference to 'The Devil Doll' in her *Strange Orchids* brings back vividly the memory of the day I attended that picture at the Capitol Theater in New York City, accompanied by Otto Binder and Julius Schwartz. Not that the movie itself was worth remembering; but it's still pleasant to recall the way we three loudly applauded when A. Merritt's name appeared on the screen. If any WT reader present at that time remembers the cheering trio down in front, he may be glad to learn that one of them was the famed second half of Eando Binder, and that another was the equally famed editor of the leading amateur fantasy publication, the old-regime *Fantasy Magazine*. Soon after that, it was my privilege to dine at the apartment of Seabury Quinn; seldom have I met a more accomplished speaker, fascinating conversationalist, or cordial host. I spent one of the most enjoyable evenings of my existence in his company, and it was only with extreme reluctance that I forced myself to leave as the hands of his wall-clock approached the morning hour. So, you see, Miss Quick's novel tale interested one reader far more than perhaps she had expected."

The March Cover

Robert A. Madle, of Philadelphia, writes: "The cover of the March WT is quite attractively drawn. The colors are well chosen, and that black background lends an air of horror to it. Mrs. Brundage is certainly an excellent artist; one comparable to that master, Virgil Finlay. Their cover illustrations and interior drawings make WEIRD TALES the most attractive magazine on the stands. Keep them working. In the present issue the three outstanding stories are: *The Last Archer* by Earl Peirce, Jr.; *The Guardian of the Book* by Henry Hasse; and *The Brood of Bubastis* by Robert Bloch. Finlay's illustration for Hasse's eery yarn was about the best he has ever drawn. He certainly can depict the undepictable."

Dorothy Quick's Stories

Jane A. Seaman, of Rye, New York, writes: "I have never before felt like voluntarily writing to any publication in praise of its stories. Nevertheless *Strange Orchids* is a weird tale written so plausibly that I can only compare Dorothy Quick's stories to the works of Edgar Allan Poe. It is easily my favorite in this issue. I have noticed her stories before, and aside from her fluent prose I think the references to ancient and mediæval history give her stories an interesting background."

The Last Archer

Julius Hopkins, of Washington, D. C., writes: "Earl Peirce, Jr., once again gets my selection for first place, this time without a rival within two universes of him. *The Last Archer* is one of the most unusual weird tales I have ever read. I only remember one weird yarn that ever had anything to do with archers and that was *The Bowmen* by Arthur Machen; but that was a ghost story, while this had to do with a strange curse. *The Last Archer* will be put on my list of stories to be reread again and again as the years pass by—a list which very few have the chance to make, for a story to be read over and over must be able to hold its weird atmosphere and action with freshness of life each time it is read. Second place goes to Henry Hasse's splendid story, *The Guardian of the Book*. Mr. Hasse is well qualified to write stories dealing with books, as was evidenced by his yarn. He has probably seen more weird literature than anyone in the United States with the probable exception of H. P. Lovecraft, who—though he doesn't admit it—probably has a copy of the *Necronomicon*. *The Brood of Bubastis* by Robert Bloch has some good weird atmosphere and a typical Blochian climax. The idea of mating expressed in the story isn't particularly

elevating to the moral sense of the reader, but, outside of that, the tale is excellent. I award third place to it. *Strange Orchids* by Dorothy Quick is a good gruesome yarn, but is also a typical pulp melodrama in which the hero arrives just in time to save the bride-to-be. I knew the eventual conclusion long before it arrived, as expected, but even so, I enjoyed reading it, for it was entertainment in the form of a weird tale. *The Dark Star, The Elixir of Death* and the rest of the stories I also like very much, particularly *The Anatomy Lesson* by William J. Makin. That fellow knows his skeletons."

Space-Wanderer Stories

Louise Leftevich, of Inglewood, California, writes: "It is a long time since I have taken my pen in hand to write about WT. I almost did last month. I enjoyed the story about the girl who wore shoes of human skin and who came alive again in modern times—as you see, I have forgotten its name and my magazine is given away (as usual). . . . When I get my copy of WT I always read first—the Eyrie—then the reprint and then plunge hopefully into the body of the magazine. Why hopefully?—because I'm always looking for a story that will measure up to the standards set once by Nictzin Dyalhis and Edmond Hamilton and the creator of Northwest Smith. . . . Aren't there ever going to be any more space-wanderer stories? I know that a lot of the readers don't like them, but surely there must be some who do, even if they aren't articulate about it." [Henry Kuttner has written a space-wanderer tale that is a pippin, called *Raider of the Spaceways*. It will appear in WT soon.—THE EDITOR.]

Benedictine

Fred C. Miles, of New Providence, New Jersey, writes: "To have HPL in the March issue is comparable to sipping Benedictine after having finished a meal that was a tribute to the gastronomic arts. Lovecraft is superb, inimitable. How I would love to travel through the Miskatonic Valley to the town of Arkham! Reprint more and more of his tales. I'd like to read again *The Rats in the Walls*. Virgil Finlay's illustration for Hasse's yarn was shattering in its impact. A cold, demonic force hurled itself from the page, smashing its way through to the very brain."

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An Octogenarian Reader

David Beams, of Mountain View, New Jersey, writes in part: "After reading WEIRD TALES for the last four or five years I feel that I ought to let you know that I think very highly of this magazine. Being well on to eighty and having been brought up in a literary community, I am hard to please in such matters. You have got hold of some truly great story writers. *Shambleau,* by Moore I think, was equal to Edgar Allan Poe at his best. . . . Lovecraft is always at a high level. You may notice that each of these writers knows how to write good literary English, which in these days of ignorant misuse of words and vicious disregard of grammar makes reading a delight instead of an irritation. I say nothing about Conan, except that I quite agree with you that nobody but Howard can do Howard's wonderful work."

Seabury Quinn's Best

B. M. Reynolds, of North Adams, Massachusetts, writes: "Mere words cannot begin to express my profound admiration for Seabury Quinn's superb story of reincarnation, *The Globe of Memories.* That is absolutely the best thing Quinn has ever written. The story had everything: splendid construction, a hero and heroine that were *real,* an excellent suspense build-up and the theory of reincarnation drawn most convincingly. I consider this the most outstanding tale since *Through the Gates of the Silver Key* and *Golden Blood.* Virgil Finlay's commendable cover was in a class with the story. He and St. John are giving us the finest cover work the magazine has ever had. I recall two other fine yarns of reincarnation which do not deserve the oblivion to which they have passed: *The Girl from Samarcand* and *The Greatest Gift.* Without a doubt, they are well worth reprinting. And I heartily second Henry Kuttner's motion in regard to reprinting *Lochinvar Lodge.* That was a grand yarn. So were: *Bimini, The Space-Eaters, The Moon Bog* and *The City of Glass.* The second best story, this month, was *The Poppy Pearl* by Frank Owen, a glamorous picture of the Southern Seas with their coral beaches, waving palms and moon-bathed tropic nights. While the tale itself was a trifle weak in spots, Mr. Owen more than made up for this with his vivid descriptions. Truly, a poem in prose depicting all the charm and witchery of the tropics. Many thanks for *The Vaunsburg Plague*—the first weird-scientific story in a long time. An original and novel yarn which I enjoyed very much. You should print at least two of these in each issue. An interplanetary or space-horror tale occasionally would help give variety. *Dig Me No Grave* by the late Robert E. Howard was the best of the shorts. I hope you still have several to come by him. Now, for just one criticism: The reprint, *A Gipsy Prophecy,* would make excellent reading at an old maids' convention or as a bedtime story for the kiddies. It might even help to start a roaring fire on a frosty morning, but as a weird tale, it was a rather poor piece of work. Why print such stuff when your readers are clamoring for more WEIRD TALES reprints than you can ever possibly give them?"

Comments on March Stories

John V. Baltadonis, of Philadelphia, writes: "The best story in the March issue was Earl Peirce, Jr.'s yarn, *The Last Archer.* This up and coming author is going to go places fast if he maintains such a standard. Second best was G. G. Pendarves' thrilling tale, *The Dark Star.* I hope that he will delight us with another story in the not too distant future. Henry Hasse's debut in WT is favorable, at least to me; although I'm getting sick of these 'forbidden book' stories. Nevertheless, it *did* keep me interested—and that's what counts. I hope to read more from his youthful pen (or typewriter). Although I enjoyed *Strange Orchids,* it wasn't as good as some of Dorothy Quick's former stories. *Eric Martin's Nemesis* has a new twist at the end. From the beginning of it, I thought that it would be another one of those 'ghost-drive-you-mad' stories. To my surprize and relief, it wasn't. Was surprized to see Eddie Hamilton in such an inconspicuous corner of the magazine. Needless to say, his story was good. Durn good story, *The Picture in the House.* The cover was good except for the gal lyin' on the bed robe. Brundage should have omitted that."

Dramatic and Thrilling

Elizabeth M. Keck, of Hazleton, Pennsylvania, writes: "I have bought another copy of WEIRD TALES to read *Strange Orchids* and find it just as dramatic and thrilling as all the other stories this author writes. Miss

Quick's story is the best in the March issue, I think, and the next best is *The Brood of Bubastis*. Why? because they hold the attention, particularly *Strange Orchids*."

Fresh from the Ink-pot

Henry Allen Vaux, of New York City, writes: "As long as you append that blank inviting comment—and as long as you include stories by Dorothy Quick, you will find me emerging from the ink-pot. With other men in this club who read WEIRD TALES, I agree that this woman is by far the best on your staff. She knows what she wants to tell and she knows *how* to put it down. There is no striving for picturesque lingo—nor running off into unknown byways. She is succinct—dramatic—honest, and her simplicity in delivery is actually diverting in these days of false literary grandeur."

Pithy Paragraphs

P. L. Breus, of New York City, writes: "*Strange Orchids* has what stories *should* be made of but seldom are, especially in your type of magazine! It's a yarn nicely told, and it holds—but where did you get that cover? Wow!"

S. J. Fuscia, of New York City, writes: "It has been quite a long time since I have written in to the Eyrie. I have just finished reading the March issue and found it quite an ace. *The Guardian of the Book* by Henry Hasse is to my estimation the best in this issue."

Harry B. Evans, of Cambridge, New Jersey, writes: "Keep up the good work and give us some more good stories like *Strange Orchids*. It's weird, all right, but good reading."

H. Sivia, of Palestine, Texas, writes: "Have just finished reading the current issue of WT, and it's a dilly! But mainly, *The Last Archer* is what got me. This yarn is really great and deserves to rank along with the true masterpieces of weird fiction. Mr. Peirce is to be congratulated on this splendid work."

Eva Babb, of Richland Center, Wisconsin, writes: "For many years I have been a steady reader of your magazine. Like many others of your readers, I prefer the type of stories that deal with the occult and truly weird. In your last issue the stories were all excellent with the exception of *The Vaumsburg Plague*. *The Globe of Memories* was a fine story by

NEXT MONTH

The Carnal God

By JOHN R. SPEER *and* CARLISLE SCHNITZER

AN UTTERLY strange and thrilling novelette that will hold you spellbound in the fast-moving sweep of events—the story of a golden image that was instinct with evil life—a tale of the terrible weird fire that burned with the cold of outer space—a weird-scientific tale of an entity from another world.

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a favorite author. I have saved my copies of WEIRD TALES for a long time and enjoy rereading them."

Samuel Gordon, of Washington, D. C., writes: "Having always maintained, with resignation, that if any number of WT contained at least two good stories, I would be content, I must admit that the March number left me a little breathless. With the possible exception of one or two stories, this issue really was a treat in the 'bizarre and unusual'."

William J. Smith, of New Brunswick, New Jersey, writes to the Eyrie: "I see that there are three poems in the February number, all of which are excellent, but I liked *Dead Singer* most of all. I think Mr. Kramer did well in his peculiar arrangement of syllables which was vaguely like Holmes' *The Last Leaf*. Very fine feeling."

Mearle Prout, of Stillwater, Oklahoma, writes: "I can't overlook this opportunity to congratulate you on having published *The Globe of Memories* by Seabury Quinn. It is one of the finest weird stories I have ever read."

Bernard A. Beauchesne, of Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, writes: "Henry Kuttner turned out an exceedingly good yarn this month. *I, The Vampire* has all the elements of a weird story, and I hope that he turns out another like it in the very near future."

Thomas J. McDonald, of New York City, writes: "*The Last Archer*, in the March issue, was one of the best stories I've read in a long time, and *The Dark Star* was so vividly described and in a few words, that I might have been watching a motion picture. The story was *good*. The magazine is far more than satisfactory and I hope to see many more issues."

Artists in This Issue

The cover design, illustrating *The Mark of the Monster*, was drawn with colored crayons by Margaret Brundage. The illustrations for *The Last Pharaoh*, *Duar the Accursed* and *The Horror in the Burying-Ground* were drawn by Virgil Finlay. The drawing for *The Salem Horror* was done by James Mooney, Jr. Harold S. DeLay drew the illustrations for *The Mark of the Monster* and *The Wind from the River*. The art headings for the Eyrie and the Weird Story Reprint are the work of Andrew Brosnatch and Hugh Rankin, respectively.

Your Favorite Story

Readers, which stories do you like best in this issue? Write a letter expressing you views, or fill out the coupon at the bottom of this page, and send it to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES. As this issue goes to press, two stories are in a neck and neck race for favorite story: *Strange Orchids* by Dorothy Quick, and *The Last Archer* by Earl Peirce, Jr.

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Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

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COMING NEXT MONTH

DEAN stepped forward, stumbled and fell headlong into the icy water. He felt a flicker of swift movement, and then abruptly hot lips were pressed against his. Human lips, Dean thought, at first.

He lay on his side in the chill water, his lips against those responsive ones. He could see nothing, for all was lost in the blackness of the cave. The unearthly lure of those invisible lips thrilled through him.

He responded to them, pressed them fiercely, gave them what they were avidly seeking. The unseen waters crawled against the rocks, whispering warning.

And in that kiss strangeness flooded him. He felt a shock and a tingling go through him, and then a thrill of sudden ecstasy, and swift on its heels came horror. Black loathsome foulness seemed to wash his brain, indescribable but fearfully real, making him shudder with nausea. It was as though unutterable evil were pouring into his body, his mind, his very soul, through the blasphemous kiss on his lips. He felt loathsome, contaminated. He fell back. He sprang to his feet.

And Dean saw, for the first time, the ghastly thing he had kissed, as the sinking moon sent a pale shaft of radiance creeping through the cave mouth. For something rose up before him, a serpentine and seal-like bulk that coiled and twisted and moved toward him, glistening with slime; and Dean screamed and turned to flee with nightmare fear tearing at his brain, hearing behind him a quiet splashing as though some bulky creature had slid back into the water. . . .

Two popular writers of weird fiction have joined forces to produce one of the eeriest sea stories ever written—the story of the thing that swam in the black waters off the California coast, and called itself Morella Godolfo. The story will be printed complete in the June issue of WEIRD TALES:

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—Also—

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By PAUL ERNST

Nobody knew that he had killed his sweetheart, but her little red heels tapped a march of death wherever he went, driving him to a desperate resolve.

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By HAROLD WARD

A terror-tale of much power, about the frightful wraith from Beyond, that brought weird panic and death to the little town in the Louisiana swamplands.

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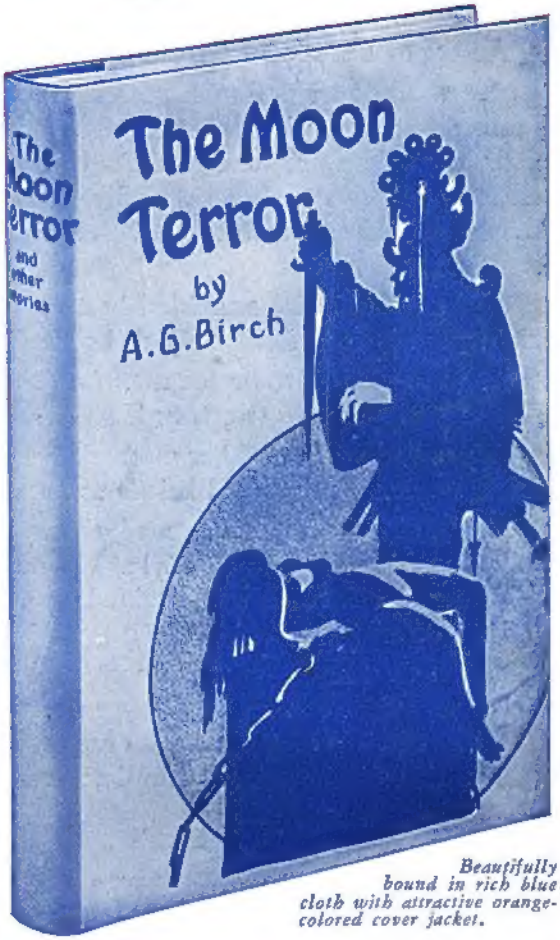

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